

SERMON

Pentecost 18 Year A

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labor and do all your work.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

Prayer:

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Sermon:

Mark Twain told a story about a man
who'd memorized the Ten Commandments ⁱ
and reciting them on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

“Can't you just stay home and keep them?”, he asked?

The Ten Commandmentsⁱⁱ get a lot of press.
They are the Poster Child for
Obnoxious Self Assured Christian Thinking.

- Should they be allowed in public places?
- Should they be posted in court houses?
- Should they be recited in public schools

Let's look at what Jesus had to say about those questions.

[PAUSE]

Not much.

Jesus never mentioned all Ten Commandments. ⁱⁱⁱ
He did summarize the 1st Five:

*“Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^{iv}*

“Love your neighbor as yourself.”^v

We in turn summarize Jesus' summary, as "The Golden Rule":
"...do to others what you would have them do to you..."^{vi}

Year ago, in the Diocese of San Joaquin,
my spiritual director told me that *love is not an option.*
Love is not negotiable, he said,
because it's what we are made of.^{vii}

When we love one another, we *are* a new creation.
When we serve one another, we *are* truly free.

In our slightly mad commerce driven world,
We are pressed to get stuff, and to keep stuff – -
and then to get more stuff.

Because the focus is on us and on our stuff,
It can be really hard to love and serve our neighbor.
How did we confuse capitalism with Christianity?^{viii}

The World's compass points us inward, towards ourselves.
But God's compass points us outward,
Into community and into God's Kingdom.
Towards others. Towards God.^{ix}

God gave us life, but *life isn't about us.*
Life is about God and it's about our neighbor.

We are called to love God.
With All our heart. All our soul. All our mind.
AND we are to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Will they know we are Christians by our love?
Will they see love when they watch us
at work, or in traffic, or in a line at the grocery store? ^x

Every once in awhile I am reminded that our God really does reign.
It's a wonderful thing to see God's Kingdom at work.
That's why I love to walk about the PreSchool.

When I drive about Killeen, I wonder:
"Who is my neighbor?" "Who is St. Christopher's neighbor?"

The Virus has forced us to online services,
Where people we've never met face-to-face,
see us on Sunday. *They are our neighbor.*

That bored security guard is our neighbor.
Smile and say, "Hello".

That tattooed 20 year old cashier is our neighbor. ^{xi}
Say "How are You?" ^{xii}

Love is the linchpin of God's Kingdom.
Years ago I heard a wartime love story, about 4 chaplains.

In the North Atlantic there's a big island called Greenland.^{xiii}
Except for a thin strip of Green around the perimeter,
the rest of it is ice. *It isn't very Green at all.*

In February 1943, an American WWII troopship
made its way around the Southern tip of Iceland.^{xiv}

902 men slept below deck.
Packed in like sardines. Stale air.
Lonely Moans. Homesick Sighs and Groans.

Suddenly – NAZI torpedoes. **Boom! Boom!**

A torrent of sea water belched into the ship like an icy demon.
The water rose up, higher and higher, past men's waist.

Some men thought of home.
Some thought of those he loved.

And the icy water stole men's lives.

The water rose up and up and up.
A man would scramble for a life jacket!
"Oh God!", he called out,
"Gimme a jacket! Please God. Please. "

A few lifeboats pulled away. Some men floated face down.

Four men made their way to the top deck.
They prayed together.
Each wondered what would become of him.

They were Army chaplains:
a Methodist, a Rabbi, a Reformed pastor
and a Catholic priest.

They moved about calming the panicked.
They guided the confused. They handing out life jackets,
Until there were no more.

230 men survived that night.^{xv}
Four of them wore a chaplains' life jacket.^{xvi}

To build the Kingdom of God,
We must put love to work.

As Jesus did we must also,
Push back against whatever
dominates and destroys and belittles and frightens.

...As God's people, we affirm His great love,
When we push back with
all of our heart, our soul, our mind, and our strength.
When we love our neighbors as ourselves.

A rabbi once said:

"It's daylight when we can look into the face of another
person, and recognize him or her as our brother or sister.

Until then, it is night."

Jesus has shown us the Light. Let's follow him.

AMEN.

ⁱ This is a prodigious feat, since sociologists say most Christians can only remember 2 or 3!

ⁱⁱ The Ten Commandments, aka the "Decalogue" ("ten words", in Greek δεκάλογος, dekalogos") are set out in both Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 10:4. Beginning in a few centuries before Jesus there began to be confusion as to whether faithful Jews were bound only by the Decalogue, and the Talmudic laws. St. Paul the Apostle mentioned five of the Ten Commandments, in Romans 13:8.

ⁱⁱⁱ See, John 14:15. Although the Decalogue was not the central focus of Jesus' mission it did take on a considerable importance as the Church moved away from its origin in Jewish customs and increasingly developed its own. Notably, Jesus referenced the Decalogue's prohibitions against murder and adultery, which he rephrased and summarized in Matthew 19:16–19 and 22:34–40.

^{iv} See, Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18

^v “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” See, Matt 22:36-40

^{vi} Matt 7:12 NIV

^{vii} Monsignor Stephen Frost, Christ the King Catholic Church, Oildale, CA

^{viii} It’s probably a social sin to say that....

^{ix} And away from ourselves.

^x Forgive me, Lord, when I’m impatiently stuck in line at HEB behind an old man writing a check. Or a busy Mom sorting through her WIC vouchers.

^{xi} Jesus tended to upset the apple cart. So must we. At least a little. Loving your neighbor can be hard and scary work. But it is what we are called to do. John Wesley preached that dead religion was no religion at all. Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that Jesus Christ was Lord, not Adolf Hitler. Desmond Tutu told the racist government of South Africa that God was on the side of the oppressed. We remember and we honor Wesley, Bishop Tutu and Dietrich Bonhoeffer (who was hung by the NAZI’s.)

^{xii} ... and REALLY mean it!



^{xiii}

^{xiv} There is a pointy tip on Greenland’s south end. Ships have sailed past that tip for 5,000 years.

^{xv} Of 902.

^{xvi} “Too afraid to jump into the sea, they awaited the inevitability of being swallowed by it. Over the din, he heard a terror-filled plaintive voice repeating, “I can’t find my life jacket.” Turning toward that voice, Miller clearly heard Chaplain Fox say, “Here’s one, soldier.” Then Miller witnessed Fox remove his life jacket and put it on the soldier. At the same time, Navy Lieutenant John Mahoney cursed himself for leaving his gloves in his quarters. Chaplain Goode stopped him from returning for the gloves, saying, “Don’t bother Mahoney. I have another pair. You can have these.” Goode then removed the gloves from his hands and gave them to

Mahoney. Mahoney later realized that a man preparing to abandon ship probably would not carry a second pair of gloves.

Many of the survivors reported similar encounters with one or more of the chaplains. They seemed to be everywhere on the deck until the very end. Many survivors reported that the four chaplains locked arms and prayed in unison as the ship sank. Whether this part is accurate is unimportant, for the truth is that these four Army chaplains sacrificed themselves for the soldiers and the God that they served.” <https://armyhistory.org/no-greater-glory-the-four-chaplains-and-the-sinking-of-the-usat-dorchester/>