

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

Living Free

First I want to start with a quizz. What are the 10 commandments? Let's call them out.

Here's a little trivia for you:

In a survey done in 2007 by Kelton Research and 10 Commandments Commission they discovered that:

- only 14% of Americans can name the 10 commandments.
- And 60% can't name 5.
- Seven of the Ten Commandments are familiar to less than half of Americans, including the more commonly recited, "Honor thy father and thy mother," and "Remember the Sabbath."
- However while 80 percent of American's know the "two all beef patties" song of the Big Mac®.
- "Thou shalt not kill," was known to fewer than six in ten Americans.
- Even those who attend a place of worship at least once a week have a bit of trouble naming all ten.
- "Thou shalt not kill" (70%) and "Thou shalt not steal" (69%). This group however can all sing the Big Mac song.

I don't often preach on commandments. I tend to prefer passages on grace. But as I listened to a colleague preach this week and then as I heard a pod cast on the laws I suddenly felt drawn to this text. I was drawn to it because I was reminded that the commandments are given to people who are for the first time in their lives living Free.

In the last few weeks we have been looking at the Exodus wilderness narrative each week in our gathering time. We have been following Moses, God and the people of Israel as they journey from slavery to freedom.

“It has not been easy since they left the celebration on the banks of the Red Sea. The people have been quarreling with Moses and "testing" God, God has been working to keep up with the people's basic needs for food and water, and Moses has about had it with being the leader of this not-so-merry band.

In the context of the larger narrative, the giving of the commandments can be understood as providing the people with a sense of purpose and identity and even a bit of security. Although God has brought them out of Egypt and performed a number of miracles, it is not until this point

in the story that God tells the people about God's intentions for them.”¹

The commandments are not simply a list of rules given to whip these people into shape. Rather they are a way to build community, bound not by common goals of wealth and prestige, but rather by loyalty to a God who has chosen to redeem a group of slaves from a life of bondage. The commandments mean to sketch out a space where human beings can live fruitful, productive, and meaningful lives before God and with one another.

In a sense God is saying. “You are free people now, and this is how free people live.” He is letting them know that to live healthy and fruitful lives they must live for God and neighbour first. Freedom offers you the opportunity to care for one another, to put God and others first.

The first commandment is the center of Jewish faith and practice. It says “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 God's before me.

This is the most important commandment. It's not “You shall not murder” or steal, or covet, or... I believe it was first and foremost because if you followed number one commandment you likely didn't need to worry about the other nine. If you put God first you wouldn't be stressed about idolatry, or not respect God's name. If you put God first you would remember the sabbath day and keep it holy.

For the person who truly put God first every day would be holy but the sabbath day would be the most holy of days. I think this one might be the hardest commandment for many in this day and age. And perhaps that is one of the reasons we are such a wound up stressed out generation. But think about what a gift this commandment could be if we listened to it. Even more so think about what a gift this commandment would have been for the people of Israel. Slaves were told they were to have a day off. In fact this became one of the earliest labour laws. Owners were to give their slaves a day off. Imagine how that would have been for these people.

Each of the rest of the commandments are the same as the rest. Put God and neighbour before yourself and you will not struggle with keeping them. When Jesus says “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.” this is how you do it. the law is not so much for you as it is for your neighbour. And if we are all living free, best lives for our God and neighbour we will all live the best lives possible.

See against popular belief the religious life is not all about the self. It's not all about just you or just me. The religious life that is faithful involves loving and caring about every one and everything we encounter. It is fine for us to sit in our pew and get fed but if we do not feed others with God's love and grace there is not a lot of point to sitting in a pew.

¹ Erickson, Amy <http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?tab=2&alt=1>

See when we put God first in our lives we will watch our lives change. We will watch our relationships alter, our neighbours will react differently. This may take time but more than not it will happen. And for ourselves... I know that when I am more in harmony with God I am more in harmony with myself. As we come into harmony with God, we will find ourselves more in harmony with our families—with our neighbors—with ourselves—and with our world.

The reality is it's not bad to hear these commandments once and awhile not so that we feel guilt, judgement, or pride and glory depending on how many we are getting right. But rather so that we can be reminded of what it is to live in freedom, and harmony with God and other. Rather so that we can be reminded of how we have the opportunity to live for the bringing about of God's kindom.

Of course we won't always get it right. We will forever be relearning the lessons of life. As humans most of us want to follow, not lead, we want control, not to submit. We are determined to put ourselves first, to get ourselves to the top, and we fail to recognize that perhaps we will live the best lives - truly live the most abundant lives if we put God and neighbour on the top of our list.

Richard Niell Donovan says "We could learn a great deal from Korean Christians. At this point Korea has become the great Christian nation of the late-Twentieth Century. The largest Christian church in the world is not in Dallas or Southern California but in Seoul, Korea. South Korea is sending Christian missionaries to the United States. We taught them so much about Christ in the earlier part of this century, but they are teaching us so much about discipleship today.

When the missionaries began to teach them about Christ, one man said,

Oh, I already know about him.
We say our prayers to him every day,
but that is not the name by which we call him.
The missionary asked about their prayers.
The man said,
We say our prayers
when we gather around the evening meal,
and we set out all the places
for the members of the family.
Then we set an extra plate.
We all sit back and say,
"Oh, God, you eat first!"²

Imagine having that kind of respect and reverence for God. It makes me think of how in our family we have the rule that the person who made the meal get's to eat dessert first. It is a way of honouring and thanking that person. Perhaps our Grace before a meal is that kind of symbol

² Donovan, Richard © 1997 http://www.lectionary.org/Sermons/Dono/OT/Exod_20.01-17_EatFirst.htm

and so it makes me wonder why I would ever eat without first honouring the God who has provided me this food.

Perhaps when we recover that kind of respect and reverence for God, we will learn what it means to be truly "blessed."

We live in hope of such a transformation, that we too may Live Free.

Amen.