

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent

Year B

March 4, 2018

The Rev. Paul LeClair

Exodus 20:1-17 Psalm 19 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 John 2:13-22

In the name of our loving, liberating and life-giving God;
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

- Bishop Michael Curry

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Why, oh, why, of all the sage advice, beloved traditions, and words of wisdom that have been preserved and handed down through the ages, did we decide to call those words that we've recited in our Lenten liturgy, and read in today's scripture selections *The Ten Commandments*? Didn't our ancestors know that if a person needs something of their spouse, the worse way to make their need known, is to say, "I command you to do this!" Hadn't they ever experienced that if they had concerns about a teen's friend, forbidding them to associate with them, only increases the interest in that friend? Now, *The Decalogue*, as we referred to them this morning; that's a good title. *Decalogue* sounds like ten points of dialogue by which God's will is expressed to us. I'll bet that Oprah Winfrey or Tony Robbins might call the Ten Commandments *The Ten Steps to a Better Life*. Now that sounds motivating. *Ten Commandments*, "Ouch!"

However, despite their name, *The Ten Commandments*, have withstood the test of time and have been preserved and cherished for thousands of years. So, let's consider the context of how and why they were given to God's people.



The Israelites had been wandering in the desert for 40 years.  
They'd experienced what it's like to be lost, and in need of direction.  
When I've been lost while traveling,  
if the person I've sought for directions tells me,  
"Drive to the white barn and turn left. Go to the Shores Hotel and turn right.  
Then when you reach the interchange for Route 43 and head south,"  
I know I'll follow those instructions, no matter how bossy the person sounded  
when they gave the instructions.

God's chosen people were also about to enter the long awaited promised land  
and they wanted to be prepared for the many unknowns that lay ahead for them.  
When my travel agent gives me a list of instructions about things like:  
when and how to check in at the airport,  
and how to find ground transportation when I reach my destination,  
even if they sound like "commandments,"  
my need for my agent's help motivates my willingness to comply.

Today's psalm illustrates for us, that God's commandments and precepts  
were seen as a gift, rather than as a burden.  
So, as we read the bible accounts of the giving of the Ten Commandments,  
let's try to listen to how passionately God cared for the people of Israel  
and what God envisions for us, in today's world.  
Hear how much God's desire to have a relationship with the Israelites  
shaped the giving of the Commandments.

These aren't just the house rules of a stern parent. They're the terms of relationship for God's people; God's dear children who are loved and cared for by their creator. It's almost as though God is saying, "Look, I know what will make you miserable, and here are ten things to avoid, that will keep you from misery."



Consider this story about a business management consultant and how she helped the CEO of a large company that was staring failure in the face. The CEO was trying to pull his workforce out of a production tailspin, so he swallowed his pride and called in a consultant asking for her advice. The consultant told the CEO to make a list what he did during a normal week. Once this was done, she told him to rank the list in priority. When it was finished, she told the him, "When you come to work, complete item number one before attending to item number two, and complete number two before going to number three. The next day, take out the list and start with number one again and repeat the process each and every day. Don't worry if you fail to reach lower items on your priority list. That's it." Although initially reluctant, the CEO tried it, and to his surprise, he was able to turn his company around. He lived into his own priorities and his workforce followed.



During this season of Lent, we're starting each Sunday service by reciting the Decalogue, a responsive version of the Ten Commandments. Then the celebrant has reminds us of Jesus' summary of not only the Ten Commandments, but of all of The Law and all of the teachings of the prophets.

This is Jesus' priority list.

First: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.

Second: Love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus' ejection of the moneychangers from the temple, illustrates Jesus' two-point priority list.

He could see that the practice of making sacrifices to the Lord, (a good thing) had turned into a corrupt system, by which a few people's desire to make a profit, far outweighed their yearning to honor God; to love God with all of their being.

Jesus also saw that the poor were being taken advantage of.

Not only did they need to purchase the animals for their sacrifice, they also were required to pay a temple tax in order to exchange Roman money for temple coins.

The love of money had taken the place of loving neighbor.



Like the CEO in the story, we need to prioritize and attend to first things first; whether they be in the form of the Ten Commandments or of Jesus' Summary of the Law.

If we do, we'll discover that honoring each other, being honest, respecting life, seeking justice, and all the other things God desires of us, will fall into place.

I'd like to conclude this sermon with a prayer from this morning's candle rite.

Draw us together in your love, O God.

May our restless hearts not resist you,

but continue to search, until they find their rest in you.

This, we pray in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Sources:

*The New Interpreters Study Bible*, NRSV with Apocrypha, Abington Press, Nashville, 2003

A sermon by The Rev. Ken Kesselus, March 15, 2009

A sermon by The Rev. Ben E. Helmer, March 19, 2006