

## Season after Pentecost - The Ten Commandments (Week 7)

July 7/8, 2018

Haven Lutheran Church, Hagerstown, MD

Readings: Galatians 5: 1, 13-14; Romans 6: 17-18; Deuteronomy 6: 4-9, 20-25

*Grace and peace to you from God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.*

A man is walking down a beach comes across an old bottle. He picks it up, pulls out the cork and out pops a genie! The genie says, "Thank you for freeing me from the bottle. In return I will grant you three wishes." The man says, "Great! I've always dreamed of this and I know exactly what I want. First, I want one billion dollars in a Swiss bank account." Poof! There is a flash of light and a piece of paper with account numbers appears in his hand. He continues, "Next, I want a bright red, brand-new Ferrari right here!" Poof! There is a flash of light and a bright red, brand-new Ferrari appears right next to him. The man goes on, "Finally, I want to be irresistible to women." Poof! There is a flash of light and the man turns into a box of chocolates.<sup>1</sup>

I could say that joke has something to do with my sermon, but that would be a lie, which goes against one of the Ten Commandments we have been looking at these last six weeks. No, it was just a typical preacher ploy to pull you into this final sermon on the Big Ten. I thought a joke would be better than a pop quiz. The looks on your faces might be funny to me but that would be selfish, which surely has to go against at least one of the other commandments.

Jokes aside, the Commandments are all about love, you know. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and the love and power of God provided the way for them to become a freed people with a new alternative way of life. The Lord who led them out of slavery, through the desert and into the Promised Land provided the way for them to remain free and be God's blessing in the world. Those commandments

given at Mt Sinai look like a list of rules, but they are so much more. The commandments “are a vision of what is possible when folk draw faithfully close to the power and purposes of God.”<sup>2</sup> They are a vision of a world in which the dignity and fullness of humanity are restored and respected by all. The Commandments lay out an alternative community in which the love and power God freely gives us overflows from us onto our neighbors and into the world. It doesn’t guarantee life will be easy or painless, but “there is a level of sanity and safety and serenity gained from aligning our lives with God”<sup>3</sup> that will uphold us and benefit my neighbor

The commandments are not simply a list of do’s and do not’s but a way of life in which God is in every inch and minute. Our Hebrew ancestors remember this by reciting a prayer called the Shema twice a day. It is as familiar to them as the Lord’s Prayer is to us. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” We read it this morning in Deuteronomy. Some translate the first Hebrew word, *shema*, as “remember.” “Remember, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” What does it mean to remember God is our only God? Jesus explained it by reciting the next verse in Deuteronomy. “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” It’s not just knowing in your head that God is God but loving the Lord who first loved us, who loves us unconditionally and eternally. This is the LORD we remember and love — the LORD who passionately, sacrificially, forever loves each of us. Life lived faithfully is a responding with our whole lives to that deep, unearned, freely given love of God.

You see, in Deuteronomy and throughout scripture, “love is never emotions-minus-ethics. One demonstrates love for God by what one does and what one does not do... not merely by how one does or does not feel”<sup>4</sup> or what he or she says they

believe. How do we love God? “By obeying God’s commands, by loving our neighbors as ourselves, and by teaching our children and our children’s children to do the same.”<sup>5</sup> Which sounds to me like the mission of the church and its members — whether it’s in Hagerstown, Florissant, Missouri, or Washington D.C., whether it’s the church here in the states or in South Korea, Palestine, Zambia or Argentina. It’s the church that loves God when filling backpacks with a weekend’s supply of food each week of the school year; holding a Vacation Bible School and School Supply Giveaway; going to D.C. to feed, help, learn and open your hearts to strangers God will put in your path; keeping in touch with the homebound, the student away at college or the person who suddenly stops showing up; listening, looking, wondering where God can use us next. That’s loving God. That’s being church. That’s one meaningful way to live.

I’m back where I began. The giving and the living of the Commandments is all about love. The commandments lay out a way of life that frees us from greed, frees us of the anxiety of whether we are good enough. The commandments lay out a way of life that frees us to share rather than hoard, frees us to be grateful for what we have rather than obsessing about what we don’t have, frees us to forgive rather than be slaves to grudges, frees us to love as we have been loved. Our Lord in Word and Jesus has given us a way to live that will be fruitful, healing and restorative, not just for us personally but for the community and world. Why? Because God loves completely and boundlessly all creation, you and me. That love of God has the power to transform our hearts to be at peace, full of joy and eager to share God’s determination to free the world of hatred, poverty, meanness, hunger and loneliness.

God's love poured into us is to be poured out into a hurting world. The commandments help us to remember that our actions, individual or corporate, matter. "Each of us through the decisions we make day in and day out make society stronger and better or weaker and crueler." <sup>6</sup> Preacher and Professor Fred Craddock, once said: We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking a \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table—here's my life Lord, I'm giving it all! But the reality for most of us is that God sends us to the bank and has us cash in that \$1,000 bill for a big sack of quarters. Most of us go through life putting in .25 cents here and .50 cents here. In other words, in a hundred different ways, every day, most of them small, we decide whether God alone is Lord and whether we will love God with all our heart, and soul and might. [It's not a onetime decision but a constant one.] Will we worship God, or will we worship other gods. And will we love God with all our heart and soul and might, or will we love other things more? Every day, in different ways, we answer those questions. And sometimes we get it right, and sometimes we don't."<sup>7</sup>

Which is why we need the reminder of the commandments, the Shema and Jesus telling us, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Why should we love God and neighbor? It won't likely get you million in a Swiss bank account or a Ferrari or even a box of chocolate. Love is the reason why. Loving God and our neighbor is God's way. And if that isn't a good enough reason, loving God and neighbor is the way to lasting peace. It's the answer to our prayer "thy kingdom come, they will be done on earth as it is in heaven." "Remember, children of God: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone." Recite it to your children. Recite at home

and away, when you lie down and when you rise. “Remember, children of God: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone.” And you will find that the commandments of God and the ways of Jesus will become a beacon of light rather than a burden.... an alternative way of life and freedom so that others can see the wonder of what God’s love can do.

A man was walking on the beach. He found a bottle. Pulled the cork and out popped a genie. “Thank you for freeing me from the bottle. In return I will grant you three wishes.” The man says, “Great! I’ve always dreamed of this and I know exactly what I want. I want these two thing, that every single person in the world — including me — love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and might and to love our neighbor as ourselves.” Poof. A bright flash of light. “You still have one more wish,” the genie said. “Who needs another wish? It’s heaven on earth?”

Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 7/7/18

## ENDNOTES

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1. Unknown

2. Walter Brueggemann, “The Hard Miracle of Transformation” June 12, 2008 [The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann](#) Westminster John Knox Press, 2011 p. 318

3. Anne B. Epling "Write These Words" Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church March 2, 2014 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52f1704be4b080c60b246c7c/t/531f26b0e4b018be29dd8bbe/1394550448137/March+2.pdf>

4. Brent A. Strawn, “Commentary on Deuteronomy 6:1-9” 11/01/2009 [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

5. Kathryn M. Schifferdecker, “Commentary on Deuteronomy 6:1-9” 11/04/2012 [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

6. Anne B. Epling "Write These Words" Faith Des Peres Presbyterian Church March 2, 2014 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/52f1704be4b080c60b246c7c/t/531f26b0e4b018be29dd8bbe/1394550448137/March+2.pdf>

7. Anne B. Epling