

October 27, 2019    The Ten    Exodus 20:1-21

The desk at which I write is in a room in our home which Barbara calls the office, I call the study, and which is actually, the smallest bedroom in our home. It is where my daughter sleeps when she comes to visit or spends holiday time at “home”. On the wall which I face as I work at the computer is 2 X 3 foot frame that contains 25 pictures from our first visit to Israel...walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

In the upper right hand corner is a large photograph of Rebekah and I on a camel. Below it is a picture of Mt. Arbel as seen from a boat on the Sea of Galilee. In the bottom left hand corner is a picture of a recreation of the open tomb, the stone rolled away. In the bottom right hand corner is a picture of a flower. It looks like a poppy. It is actually an anemone...what Jesus referred to as a lily of the field. In total this collage, reminds me that when I am seated at that desk I am engaged on a special commission, a holy task...serving the Lord our God, Jesus, seeking the Holy Spirit’s guidance, shepherding HIS people.

The first tablet of the Ten Commandments does not contain half of them but four. Each one sets out something important about our relationship with God. It is an exclusive relationship. He chose us. We choose to respond or not. But there is no question of who has made the relationship. HIS creation; HIS rules. We are called to recognize that HE alone is Lord. We are not worship images, portraits, or sculptures made with human hands. Seeing is not the same as believing. Seeing

something we have created with our own hands is not the same as worshipping HIM.

The second tablet of the Law contains 6 commandments. That it takes more rules to govern human relationships among us is the first sign that human relationships are easily made more complex by us. Our relationship with God is straight forward. He has chosen us. Human relationships are more complex because we are involved.

Commandment Five: Honour your father and your mother. God tells us that our parents are very special. We owe them a special allegiance. It does not say...no matter what. In other words it assumes that our parents gave us life and were loving parents. This is not about remaining in a relationship even if it is abusive. Commandments five through ten assume that the relationships are positive and healthy. I will say again. These commandments are not about the sanctity of a destructive harmful relationship. We honour our parents because they should deserve honouring...providing the necessities of life is assumed. Loving and protecting is assumed. Honouring their love for us, has a consequence. "Living long in the land the Lord God has given to us. If the relationship with our parents has been characterized by the performance of parental duty, love and care, our honouring should mean stable family life. Stable family life for us as children. A positive modelling of what parenting is about. Of

what family life should be. God's intention is that family should be a positive experience for everyone involved.

Commandment Six is blunt and clear. You shall not kill. This translation makes it even clearer when it uses the word murder. God created life. It is sacred. We are not to assume the power over life and death. That does not mean you can set aside your duty if you are a soldier. It does mean you and I are not to shoot and stab, making ourselves judge, jury and executioner. I said at the beginning...human relationships are complex because we and the people we relate to make it complicated, sin enters into the mix. It changes societies when it is remembered that life is sacred, and to be protected. It makes human society more stable, more peaceful.

Commandment Seven is also blunt and clear. You shall not commit adultery. It is about the sanctity of marriage. Once again there is an assumption. The assumption is that the couple involved love each other. Wanted each other. Pursue happiness together. Sharing life and caring for one another. Don't think for a moment that Barbara and I are perfect. We are not clones and we both have tempers. I have told the story about Billy Graham quoting his wife on the Johnny Carson show. She was addressing a Women's Conference and she was asked if she had ever considered divorce. She smiled and said, "Never" and then she added, "Murder a thousand times." This commandment assumes love. It assumes a desire to keep the family together. That is not out of date. But it takes work. And

I remember reading an article in McLean's Magazine some years ago about divorce being on the decline. Maybe we are coming to our senses. That is why the Prodigal Son headed home to his father. He came to his senses, saw life differently. He chose to return regardless of the cost to him.

Commandment Eight. You shall not steal. If people are going to live in communities together, in countries together, there is a need to respect boundaries. You know I love the farmhouse. Before we installed the alarm system we went through a period of time when we had 17 breakins in 13 years. Each time we lost something. When we installed the alarm system it was because such systems had become affordable, changes in technology. The point of the commandment is that people should not be after stuff or money and be willing to harm others to take what others have. The sanctity of other people's property.

Commandment Nine. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. In short this is about the sanctity of the truth. We are called by the Lord God Himself not to harm others by what we say. Especially we are not to participate in a plot to hurt our neighbour when there is a court case by saying things, testifying to what we know by false information.

Commandment Ten raises the bar even higher. We are not to go about brooding over the fact that our neighbour has nice stuff. We are not make even imaginary plans of what we would do if we had his house, his car, his boat or anything else

that is his. Not even thinking about it...feeding our want response.

The commandments are important. That they are God's commandments makes them holy laws. Matters of faith. A Code by which believers should live. And the truth is they are never out of date. They are not simply cultural values which evolved and may evolve again so as to become irrelevant.

We cannot leave the matter of Human conduct in a context of faith, without remembering that Jesus was once asked a question which amounted to, "Of all the commandments in the whole of the Old Testament, which one is the most important". Jesus response to that question brings us back to the relevance of the Ten Commandments. Jesus said the most important commandment is this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."(Matthew 22:37) In fact that is Jesus summary of commandments one to four. And then Jesus gave the Pharisee who had asked the question a freebie, a bonus piece of information. Jesus said, "This is the first and greatest commandment and the second is like unto it: Love your neighbour as yourself."(Matthew 22:38-39) That of course is Jesus summary of commandments five through ten. They are relevant and benevolent. They produce peace, increase joy, and they recognize that in God's Kingdom there are absolutes. When Jesus said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments," HE was saying these two

commandments are the glue that makes the Old Testament important to life in our time.

Let us pray;

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: we ask your blessing on this church, the work you have set us, and the world we have proposed to do in order that we might help others in our community and our nation. We build (we know) on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Grant that our witness might be worthy of you and this church family. Open our eyes to need and show us practical ways to assist. Give us vision that will carry your word of truth into the future. Walk with us that we might be stronger than we think we are. Pour your grace upon the world where we are living we ask. In Jesus name. Amen