

SERMON FOR MARCH 7, 2021

TEXT: EXODUS 20: 1-17

THEME: THE DESIGN FOR LIFE

And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** “You shall have no other gods before me. **4** “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

In the name of Jesus:

W. C. Fields once claimed that he has studied the Bible for years, in his words: “Looking for a loophole.” He never did say if he found one, but I suspect that there are a great many people today who, when confronted with the Ten Commandments, do what Fields did, and look for a loophole.

What are we to do with the Ten Commandments? They, for one, make us feel uncomfortable, and rightly so. As sinful human beings, the Ten Commandments show us our sinfulness. They confront our idols, they bring to light our motivations, they magnify the cruelty of our words and actions. The Ten Commandments show us and reveal to us the way we really are.

We need the Ten Commandments, because life in America gives testimony to the continuing need for rules of conduct. Daily we hear or read of the news of people being beaten or shot during an argument. Guns in school is a constant and shared concern of parents, teachers, and school administrators. When we examine our lives in light of the Ten Commandments, we come face to face with our sinfulness. God forbids having any other god. But look at the gods or the idols in your own life, the idol of popularity, the idol of greed, the idol of sex, the idol of self. When we just look at the First Commandment, we see that we don't fear, love, or trust in God above all things. We worry about what we don't have. We are anxious and fearful of the future and the unknown. When push comes to shove, we tend to rely on ourselves, our own capabilities, instead of first going to God and trusting in Him. The LORD says that He is a jealous God, He will share His honor and glory with no one else and with nothing else. And He promises to punish all who transgress His commandments. In light of God's Law, we deserve nothing but God's wrath and punishment.

But God is faithful and just and full of compassion and love. If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive you all of your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. He promises grace and every blessing to those who fear Him and keep His commandments. You are

forgiven, the blood of Christ cleanses you from all sin. Now, in thanks to Him, you are called to live your life to the honor and glory of the One who lived, died, and rose again for you. So now the Ten Commandments serve as a guide to show you how you can live for God.

This is why God gave the Ten Commandments in the first place, to serve as a way or as the Design for Life as children of God. When God gave the Ten Commandments to the Israelite people, they were camped around Mount Sinai. Moses had gone up into the Cloud of Glory to speak with the Lord. The people back at camp were terrified, as they saw the smoke and heard the rumbling coming from the mountain. A fence had been placed around the mountain to keep man and beast from going too far, lest they disobey God and meet their end.

Moses finally reappears and he is holding the Ten Commandments. God had given to Moses, and to His people gathered around the mountain, these words to live by. He, the Lord, was their God and they, the Israelites, were to be His people, His own prized possession. Those who believed in the Lord now had in their possessions the Design for Life, or rules by which the Lord had given them to live. If they are to walk with God, and if He is to live in their midst, then these words define how this can be a reality. If you believe in Yahweh, this is how you are to act.

Sadly, though, people being who they are, don't like anyone telling them what they are to do. Adam and Eve rebelled against the Commandment of the Lord when He told them not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The same holds true today. The Ten Commandments are viewed by many as being too restrictive, not allowing people to "be who they are or what they want to be." But in actuality, the Ten Commandments are a gift from God to us, so that we can live our lives to our utmost, to the glory of God.

In our text for today, Exodus 20, God reminds His people of who they are and how they got to this point in their lives. We read: "And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. " Before this, the nation of Israel was a nation who were enslaved to Pharaoh and the country of Egypt. They had no freedom, their lot in life was one of hard labor. Their lives were lives of oppression.

**But God heard their cry for help! God sent His servant Moses, to proclaim God's Word to "let My people go!"** God performed His mighty works through the Ten Plagues, and the slave nation was set free! They walked through the Red Sea on dry land, their enemy was defeated, they were now free and on their way to the Promised Land. God would provide for His people in the wilderness: manna and quail from heaven and water gushing

forth from a rock. These former slaves owed their freedom, their very lives to God! He alone was the One True God. There was no other! And so God said that as a result of what He had done for them: "I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." God has claimed these nomadic people to be His own, and now, seeing that they were His possession, He would be their God and they would be His people. With this came great expectations, and so God gave to them His Ten Commandments.

Dear brother and sister in Christ, you are God's prized possession. "For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. **10** Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." You were bought with a price, not with silver or gold but with the precious blood of Jesus shed on Calvary's cross. As I said last week, you have a new identity, you have been marked with the cross of Christ in the waters of Baptism. God has made you his own in the waters of your Baptism. You have been saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and this is

not of your own doing, this is a free gift of God given to you because He loves you. Just as God gave to the Israelites the Ten Commandments, saying to them, this is how I now want you to live, so also God has given to you and me the Ten Commandments as THE DESIGN FOR LIFE, so that our lives will reflect God's love for us and for all people. God has chosen you to be His own and to live under Him in His kingdom.

Just as parents, who give life to their children, will have expectations for how their children will live, so too God, who has given to you new life in Christ, He has given to you expectations as to how you are to conduct yourself, all to the glory of God. The keeping of God's command does not determine whether or not we are His children, for nothing can separate us from God's love. Rather, when we keep God's commands as His children, we show our faith in Jesus to others.

This faith is not something you conjure up in your heart or life. The faith that God commands God gives to you: in Baptism, in His Word, and in the Supper. By faith Christ lives in and through you. The life you now live, you live to the glory of God. So in the Ten Commandments, God not only gives you a Design for Living and a Way to live for Him, He gives you practical examples for living, putting into practice God's Word into real life situations, so that we can live more peaceful, more joyful lives. And when we live in this way,

putting God's Word into practice in our lives, seeking to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds, and then sharing God's love with others, loving our neighbor as we do ourselves, we then allow the life and love of God to flow in and through us, giving healing to the broken and hurting world around us.

These Commandments haven't changed since they have been given over 3500 years ago. Why? Because human nature hasn't changed. Oh, to be certain, things **have** changed, knowledge has changed, science and technology has changed, nations have changed, change is one constant in human society. But the Ten Commandments have not changed. And neither has God.

Jesus is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He loves you with an everlasting love. Christ has come, to live for you, to keep the Ten Commandments for you, Christ has come to die for you, to rise again for you, to make you His own in Baptism so that He might live in and through you. You are forgiven. You belong to Him. He now empowers you to follow Him. And in the Ten Commandments, we as His children have His Design for Life.

Amen