

Over the past few weeks we have been reading through the journey that God's people encountered in Egypt. We have read in the book of Exodus about how they were slaves under the king of Egypt. We read the stories of how God called a reluctant Moses to lead these people out of slavery and toward a new land. We read how Pharaoh resisted letting the Israelites go and how God sent 10 plagues to convince Pharaoh. Pharaoh finally allowed the Israelites to leave but then sent his army after them. Last week we read of how the Israelites crossed safely through the sea while the Egyptian army met their destruction. We also heard how the people grumbled out in the desert and how God provided for them ingredients that they could make into food to eat and sustain them. This week we come to a part of the story which is very familiar. We come to the story of Moses receiving some commandments for the people to live by.

Read Exodus 20:1-20

A couple of years ago I watched an interview with a member of the US House of Representatives from a Southeastern state. This Representative was pushing for the 10 Commandments to be displayed on public grounds. I think this Representative was sponsoring a bill to allow the 10 Commandments to be displayed in a courthouse and he was very proud of his bill. The interviewer then asked this Representative, "Please name for me the 10 Commandments."

This Representative then had on his face one of those expressions of being stumped. "You want me to name the 10 Commandments?" he asked. "Yes," the interviewer asked. "Please name for me the Ten Commandments." This Representative who thought it so important to have the 10 Commandments displayed on public property could only name 3 of the 10 Commandments.

Read Luke 10:25-28

We hear a lot of debate these days about whether or not it is permissible in our country to display the 10 Commandments. We hear that phrase a lot. The Ten Commandments. And this phrase, "the Ten Commandments" is used as a wedge to attack one another. Either one is for the 10 Commandments being displayed on public property or one is against the 10 Commandments being displayed.

But I wonder something. Does this fight over displaying the Ten Commandments actually break one of the Ten Commandments? Because I wonder if in our fight over displaying the Ten Commandments if we are, in fact, making the Ten Commandments an idol?

The 10 Commandments were not delivered to God's people to be a weapon to beat one another up. To be used as a political tool. They were instead, instructions that provided an alternative lifestyle for God's people to live in the midst of the world around them.

If we actually read these commandments, we discover that the people were instructed to place their allegiance to the God they called Yahweh. The society around them told them that their allegiance was to be to Pharaoh. A dictator along the lines of modern day Quadafi. But the instructions that Moses received said something quite different.

Instead of turning to Pharaoh to provide their needs, they were to turn to God and trust God and only God. They did not need an idol. They did not need a stand-in. All they needed to place their trust in was Yahweh God. Yahweh God would provide. Yahweh God was more powerful than any human being. Even the ones who exerted the most domination.

In addition to this allegiance to God, the Commandments also make another very important point. Loving God means loving neighbor. In a society that taught that one's purpose was to gain superiority over another, the Commandments teach instead that allegiance to Yahweh God means faithfulness to one's neighbor.

You honor your father and mother, you do not take from your neighbor, you are faithful in your relationships, you do not lie against your neighbor, you do not covet what your neighbor has. Jesus interprets these commandments very clearly. Loving God means loving those around you, including family, friend, and foe.

And something else that the Commandments teach. The commandment which is found in the middle of them all. In a world which was defined by productivity and accomplishment, the Commandments teach that in God's world there is a place for rest, for recovery, for recuperation. In God's alternative world, faithfulness is not defined by what you make and by how much you make. In God's alternative world, there is a place for restoration. For not producing.

Are you for the public display of the Ten Commandments or are you against public display of the Ten Commandments? I'm not sure that is a very helpful debate. That debate turns the Ten Commandments into an idol without real substance. That debate is about choosing up sides in a power struggle. Instead of being wrapped up in that debate, maybe we should be about living out the alternative lifestyle promoted by the Ten Commandments.

I recently read someone share about their recent experience in their college class on the History of Western Civilization. On the first day of class, the professor handed out a list of homework assignments. Each day had a reading assignment. The professor said, "I can give you a quiz over that day's reading any day, so make sure you read the assignments."

For a while, the class skimmed the assignment, but the professor never gave a quiz. The class had a major exam the Monday before Thanksgiving and then the class had one more class before the Thanksgiving break. In that last class period, when students were focused on heading out of town for the holidays, the professor came in with a folded sheet of white legal paper and said, "I think it's time for a quiz."

Who could have guessed that the class would have a quiz on the day before Thanksgiving? Class members were begging one another for any scrap of information. One class member was overheard saying that he thought the reading might be over "a war in Europe."

But then the professor offered a temporary stay of execution: "I want to be fair," he said. "Before we have the quiz, does anybody have a question over the reading that you've done?"

Class members were desperately looking around in the hope that someone who was about to become much more popular with his or her classmates would come up with a question that wasn't incredibly lame. In the back of the room a hand went up hesitantly, "Can you tell us what you thought was most significant in the reading?"

To the surprise of the students, the professor responded: "That's a helpful question." He started writing on the chalkboard, telling the class about the reading that he appeared to believe we had read. The class was clinging to any fact that might make the difference between an F and a D. After about thirty minutes of an intensely followed lecture, he got out his ominous piece of paper again and said, "Okay, let's get to the test. Here we go. But does anybody have any questions about what I just explained?"

This could be another reprieve, but at first no hands went up. Then finally someone said, "How would you set all this in context?"

The professor then went back to the board and fascinated his students with more details of the Crimean War. He stopped five minutes before it was time for class to end and said, "We still have time for the quiz. Number 1-20."

The class members still wished there wasn't a quiz, but they now knew 1854-1856, England, France, Turkey, Sardinia wins, Russia loses. The professor slowly unfolded his piece of paper and said, "Here's your quiz." The paper was blank. There was nothing there. He never planned to give a quiz. He smiled and said, "Have a happy Thanksgiving."

The person who tells this story sums it up this way, "What I most remember, more than I remember the Crimean War, is how stunned I was to realize that our teacher just wanted us to learn. I was genuinely shocked to discover that for him it wasn't about quizzes, tests or grades. He wanted us to learn."

Maybe rather than fighting over whether or not to display the Ten Commandments, we should instead be trying to live out the Ten Commandments.

Maybe what we need to be doing is learning that in God's world, life is about loving God and loving neighbor. AMEN.

- Younger, Brett, "Loving God with all your Mind," Day 1, and found at http://day1.org/3241-loving_god_with_all_your_mind

Ten Commandments and Ten Fingers: Notes for a Sermon for Children of All Ages

The Ten Commandments are important as guides for faithful daily living, yet many people cannot remember all ten when asked. Here is a way that children as well as adults can learn the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), using their ten fingers. The points made can be adapted to the age of the listeners — from children to adults.

Start with your hands together in prayer. This reminds us that God heard the prayers of the Hebrew people when they were in slavery in Egypt and freed them (Exodus 3:7, 20:2). The commandments are a way for us to show our gratitude for God's love in our lives and to further just and peaceful relationships in God's world.

1. **"I am the Lord your God; you shall have no other gods before me."**

Hold up one index finger for the number one. We worship one God.

2. **"You shall not worship idols."**

Idols, false gods, are not only things like statues, but anything in which we place our ultimate trust and allegiance—for example, money, possessions or weapons. Hold up two fingers. Should we worship more than one God? No, two is too many! One of them must be an idol, and we should not worship it!

3. **"You shall not take the Lord's name in vain."**

Use three fingers to form the letter "W" which stands for "words." Watch your words! God wants us to use his name in loving, caring ways, as we pray and as we talk about him, not in swearing or in anger.

4. **"Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy."**

Hold up four fingers, and fold your thumb under to let it rest. The thumb has the right idea. It's the Sabbath, and the thumb is following the commandment to take a day of rest. God does not want anyone to overwork or be stressed, so we need a day to rest, to be at peace, and to worship with others. God also gave us the Sabbath so that working people would not be taken advantage of by their employers (Deut. 5:14)

5. **"Honor your father and your mother."**

Hold up all five fingers on one hand as if you are taking a pledge, to honor your parents. God wants there to be peace and love in all our family relationships.

6. **"You shall not kill."**

Pretend the index finger on your second hand is a gun, shooting at the first five fingers. God's sixth commandment teaches us not to do anything that would hurt another person unfairly.

7. **"You shall not commit adultery."**

Hold one hand out flat. The five fingers and hand becomes the floor of the church. Two fingers on the other hand are the man and woman to be married, standing in the church, making promises to each other. This seventh commandment calls for couples to keep the marriage promises they make.

8. **"You shall not steal."**

Hold up four fingers on each hand, for the eighth commandment. If you stretch out your fingers slightly, these become the prison bars, which hold someone who was been arrested for stealing. Our Presbyterian Church (USA)'s Study Catechism says "God forbids all theft and robbery, including schemes, tricks or systems that unjustly take what belongs to someone else." (Question # 112)

9. **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."**

Hold up all five fingers on one hand and four on the other. Fold your second thumb under and turn your hand around, so the thumb is hiding. It is secretly going around telling the other four fingers on that hand lies and rumors about the five fingers on the other hand. It is "bearing false witness," as it talks behind people's backs, spreading gossip, criticizing others without talking directly to the people involved. Again, our Study Catechism teaches us "Negative stereotyping is a form of falsehood that invites actions of humiliation, abuse, and violence as forbidden by the commandment against murder." (Question # 115)

10. **"Do not covet what belongs to your neighbor."**

Hold out your hands, palms up, and wiggle all ten fingers to show that they've got the "gimmies." Your fingers are saying, "Gimmie what belongs to my neighbor. I want all those things my neighbor has." This is not the way God wants us to live.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Seeing your children in bondage and despair, you brought them to freedom by your compassion and hope. Longing to create a people who would care for one another, you spoke simple truths about integrity and justice. Fill our worship with sighs more precious than all we value.

You came, not to build a grand scheme, but to be our foundation of faith. You came, not to choose sides like us, but to be that peace which brings us together. You came, not worrying about what lay ahead for you, so we could see your kingdom prepared for us. Fill our worship with your grace more precious than our deepest fears.

Hear our prayers as we lift up prayers for those around the world. We pray for people in Egypt and Libya, Israel, and Palestine, bring peace to these war torn areas. Hear our prayers O Lord

Hear our prayers for folks who live and work in our own country. We lift up the CEOs, small business owners, employees and the farm workers. Hear our prayers O Lord.....

Hear our prayers for folks who are cold tonight and do not have a warm bed to sleep in but find themselves under bridges and behind stores. Hear our prayers O Lord

Hear prayers voiced by our congregation. Lead us as your people to be passionate in sharing your good news to people around us. (prayer concerns)