

Pastor Greg Briggs, Interim

Sunday, May 27, 2018

1. Prayer and Introduction
 - a. “May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, our rock and redeemer.” Amen. (Psalm 19:14)
 - b. A Prelude, or the First Commandment?
2. Sermon Series – the Ten Commandments
 - a. One of the center pieces of ancient laws and foundation of Jewish faith
 - i. Foundation of many codes of law
 - ii. Picture of Moses visible from the Speaker of the House’s chair in the House of Representatives
 - b. “Every theologian should preach through the Ten Commandments once every Three Years.” - James Arne Nestingen
 - i. RCL gives on Sunday for the Ten commandments every 3 years
 - ii. Narrative Lectionary – gives it 4 weeks, every 4 years. So, close enough.
3. My personal challenge with the Ten Commandments – the Idolatry of Evangelicals
 - a. Fights to have it put in public courthouses, emphasis that this is the bedrock of the faith
 - b. This both is, and isn’t, the basis of my Christian faith.
 - c. Kurt Vonnegut says it best
 - i. “For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). But, often with tears in their eyes, the demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course, that’s Moses, not Jesus. I haven’t heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon? Give me a break!”- Kurt Vonnegut, A Man Without a Country
 - d. So, our second sermon series this Summer is on the Beatitudes.
 - i. Whenever possible, I try to practice an “in addition to” vs. an “either or” mindset
 - e. So, for the next few weeks, I will seek to uplift
 - i. Historical Context and truth
 - ii. Possible misconceptions and Idolatries
 - iii. Timely, worldly, applications
4. Making Seemingly Simple Things Complex, and Seemingly Complex Things Simple
 - a. One of the things that hooks me about studying theology and exploring faith, is how things that seem so simple are actually not so simple
 - b. Yet, the further we go into the complexing theology, the fundamental truths, the self-evident truths, become simpler and more refined.
 - c. This is pushed even farther today, as we start our 4-week sermon series on the Ten Commandments
 - d. A foundation, a bedrock, of the Jewish and Christian faiths
 - i. Yet more complex than we’d assume
 - ii. and all the while, a guide towards a more refined and simplified faith.
5. Justification – theological context

- a. "19 comes before 20" – relationship comes before the law
 - i. UCC – formed without codified law – relationship came first
 - b. Not about "earning" salvation – relationship came first
 - c. Law isn't about "us" – it's about our neighbors, our relationships
 - d. What God has done for us
6. Exercises in unbelief and unpractice
- a. More about what not to do, than what we should do.
 - b. Basis, not entirety, of holy living
 - c. Shall not outnumber the shalls
 - i. Remember the sabbath, honor parents –
 - d. Not about personal piety, but interaction with neighbors
7. Which Ten commandments? - Differences in lists of Ten Commandments
- a. Numbering isn't the same, grouping isn't the same
 - i. 13 'commandments' depending on the grouping that is used
8. Prelude or first commandment
- a. In Christian numberings, we aren't even getting to #1 of the Ten Commandments, this is all prelude
 - b. Yet, this included the First commandment in the Talmud
 - i. And, perhaps, the first place we've gone astray with our Christian understanding of the Jewish law
 - c. Remembrance – gratefulness
 - i. Freedom from Slavery
 - d. Why should we follow these laws?
 - i. Cause God or the church says so? That works when you are 5, not when you are 25, 45, or 65.
 - ii. We follow these laws, because they were given to us by God, who saved us from slavery. God is good and worthy of being praised and obeyed
 - e. It is in the context of our relationship with God, and a reminder of what kind of a God we follow, that these Commandments have their power
 - i. Otherwise, to only focus on God's power, sets us up for a potentially abusive relationship
9. We use the Ten Commandments as a basis
- a. Threefold use of the Law – Political, Pedagogical, and Principal
 - b. To determine what makes a good or bad law
 - c. As a teaching tool – showing us when we've fallen short
 - i. Useful, but I wonder how much of this usage is what motivates evangelical idolatry of the Ten Commandments
 - d. As a principal or guide – in the complexities of our every day moral decisions
 1. Can't answer everything, but can point us in the right direction
10. Reassertion of Ten Commandments as Moral Principals
- a. We love our lists
 - i. If we only think of the commandments as laws in the legal sense, we can get good at avoiding the legal pitfalls. I didn't "Covet" my neighbor's new riding lawnmower with padded seat, self-bagging capability, and 4 gear transmission – I just had a "healthy appreciation" of it and what it must have cost...
 - b. Emphasizing the need to center in on our relationship with God

- i. Freedom from slavery and oppression
 - ii. Remembering our heritage – not just one or two generations, but back to the beginning of our faiths
 - iii. Not just about us individually, but us as a people “called to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” which dictates how we treat our neighbors and foreigners
 - iv. So perhaps we should act like it.
 - c. Caring for the foreigner – caring for people not in your group
 - d. Losing sight of our God’s essential connection with freedom and care for foreigners
11. Children are being separated from their parents at the border
- a. We are not doing that today
 - b. Between October 2016 and December 2017, [the Department of Health and Human Services] was unable to determine the exact location for 1,475 of the 7,633 minors it attempted to reach—or almost 20 percent, Steven Wagner, acting assistant secretary for the HHS’ administration for children and families, said at a Senate subcommittee testimony in April. (<https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2018/05/outrage-grows-as-horror-of-policy-to-split-children-and-parents-at-border-becomes-clear.html>)
 - i. some were given to human traffickers
 - ii. we are literally involved in creating slaves
 - c. This is a dehumanization and a tactic used by thugs and dictators
 - d. You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation?
12. Why should you care?
- a. If you read the Ten commandments like a law, technically we haven’t violated any of them
 - b. Yet, if you read it like the Hebrews do, start with the relationship between God and his people, we have violated every single one of them.
 - c. **I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**
 - d. And this doesn’t stop with the Ten commandments. 3 chapters later, **“Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt. (Exodus 23:9)”**
 - e. Or, in the words of Christ, Common English Bible (CEB)
 - f. **“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being,[a] and with all your mind. 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.[b] 40 All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.” (Matthew 22:37-40)**
13. Be a kingdom of priests
- a. Reclaim the truth of our relationship with God
 - i. We are free because of God – and we are to remember that when we interact with others
 - b. Make the complex things simple – remember that we were foreigners and slaves, so we shall free slaves and treat foreigners with compassion and love.
 - c. Just like God did for us.

Readings

Exodus 19:1-6, 20:1-2

19 On exactly the third-month anniversary of the Israelites' leaving the land of Egypt, they came into the Sinai desert. ²They traveled from Rephidim, came into the Sinai desert, and set up camp there. Israel camped there in front of the mountain ³ while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him from the mountain, "This is what you should say to Jacob's household and declare to the Israelites: ⁴You saw what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to me. ⁵So now, if you faithfully obey me and stay true to my covenant, you will be my most precious possession out of all the peoples, since the whole earth belongs to me. ⁶You will be a kingdom of priests for me and a holy nation. These are the words you should say to the Israelites."

20 Then God spoke all these words:

²I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.