



20 PENTECOST
OCTOBER 7/10/11, 2015

1ST, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Deuteronomy 5:1-21, 6:4-9; Mark 12:28-31
The Most Important Commandment

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The 10 Commandments! You've heard them named in the Bible passage...you've learned them in Sun. School/Catechism/Conf...plus you all have them **memorized**, so help me recite them again right now.

- #1 You shall have no other gods.
- #2 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.
- #3 Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.
- #4 Honor your father and mother.
- #5 You shall not murder.
- #6 You shall not commit adultery.
- #7 You shall not steal.
- #8 You shall not lie about your neighbor.
- #9 & #10 You shall not covet – your neighbor's spouse or stuff.

The first three address our relationship with **God**, the next seven address our relationship with **each other**. So turn to the *Cliff Notes* version of the 10 Commandments printed on the 6th page of your bulletin, and we'll have a little impromptu **litany** – **I** will recite the **regular** commandment and **you** respond with the **shortened** version: (thank you Bill Lyons!)

- 1. *You shall have no other gods* = **Only God**
 - 2. *Don't use God's name in vain* = **Respect God**
 - 3. *Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy* = **Enjoy God**
 - 4. *Honor your father and mother* = **Care** for the **vulnerable**
 - 5. *Don't murder* = **Respect life**
 - 6. *Don't commit adultery* = **Keep your commitments**
 - 7. *Don't steal* = **Live honestly**
 - 8. *Don't lie about your neighbor* = **Speak truthfully**
 - 9 & 10. *Don't covet* = Be **content** with what you have.
- So which of these do you think is the most important???

Before you **answer** that, I want to talk a little about rules and laws and regulations in general. I am a *baby-boomer*, and a characteristic of **my** generation is that I'm

likely to **rebel** against rules that seem senseless, that **serve** little purpose, that **carry** no obvious reason or rhyme.

Here's an example of what I'm saying. Years ago, Carolyn and I finished a meeting in downtown Minneapolis around 4:00 in the afternoon and started heading home. We had to make a left turn to get to the freeway, but at every intersection the signs said, **NO LEFT TURN AFTER 4:00pm**.

Finally, I got my chance to turn...or **so I thought!** We came to a light where the *through* street was blocked-off for construction. **And**, I reasoned, since I could no longer drive straight ahead, **surely** they would allow me to turn left **here...** (You know where this is going, right?)

Well, I turned **left**...and was promptly pulled over by a...pleasant yet...persistent police officer.

-He nodded in agreement with my assessment of the situation.

-He acknowledged my decision to turn in the midst of the moment.

-Then he wrote me out a ticket – and wished me, ***Good luck in court!***

I was **indignant!** I was **angry!** It didn't make any **sense**. It was **not** a congested area, the **intersection** was limited, the way **through** was blocked – but **still** the rule stood: **NO LEFT TURN AFTER 4:00pm...** I was **mad**...though, **mostly**, I was mad...at **myself** – because I **knew** that what I'd done...was **wrong**.

So here's a peek into my personality: though I have a **generational** tendency to **rebel against** authority, I **also** have a **genetic** tendency to **obey** it. The **German** part of me finds a **great deal** of **comfort** in the law. A deep **respect** for rules **flows** through my **veins** – and it comes out **full force** in a number of places...**especially**...in the ***kitchen!***

I **love** to *cook* – **but**...I love to do it **systematically!** I **hate** being told to: use a ***dash of this***, or a ***splash of that***... And it drives me **nuts** when a recipe simply ends with the words bake until done... ***Thankyou*** for that. I was **only** planning to bake it until it was ***half*** done? Please!!!

-I want to **measure** how **much** powder is in a ***dash!***

-I want to **know** how many ounces are in a ***splash!***

-and I want to be told, ***bake at 400 degrees for one hour***...and then I'll **know** it's done!!! Following the **law** of the recipe assures me that **all** will turn out **well**...

In a very **real** sense, the **Law** for the people of **Israel** was viewed in a similar way. A **gift** from **God**, the Law was revered as a *holy guide* to life. It left **nothing** to chance. It had become a sort of **recipe** to follow for every situation.

The **goal** was to produce a holy way of life that was:

- agreeable** to the individual,
- attractive** to the community and
- appealing** to God.

In **some** ways, it seems **so simple**, right? Just start with the **first** commandment and check 'em off as you go down the list.

- You shall have no other gods...check!
- You shall have no other gods...check??
- You shall have no other gods**...hm...

Martin Luther, in the Small Catechism, tells us having no other gods: *means that we are to fear, love and trust God above everything else*. He **also** says elsewhere that if **only** we could get this **first** one right, we'd get all the **rest** of them right as **well**. Then **Jesus** says pretty much the same thing when he tells us: *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also* (MT 6:21).

And **here's** where we get into **trouble**, because we treasure *lots* of things in life that can be in direct competition with God **for our hearts**. From good and useful things like **money**, **time**, **family**, and **work**, to lots of other things that could **ruin** our lives in a heartbeat, **it doesn't matter** – if we treasure anything before God, then the battle's lost.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is asked the question, *What is the most important commandment?* Do you remember what he replied? *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these* (Mark 12:30-31). In other words, we get just these **two** commandments right, and **God** can take a **vacation!!!**

This is the *truth* that **Luther** sees at work in the 1st commandment – **it's all about love**. When God says, *I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD; YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS*, he's declaring to the *universe* that he has picked **you**, and he has picked **me**, and he has picked *everyone everywhere* to know his incredible gift of **love** for us **all**.

And even **there** God refuses to stop. The **Bible** tells us that God's like a **shepherd** out **seeking lost sheep**. And every time he finds one, or two, or twenty-thousand, or a **planet-ful**, he **cries** out in a *joyful* voice, *Finders keepers!!!* – and **gathers** us all, **embracing** us in love.

Now, the sad truth is we all wander away from the Lord – **sometimes intentionally**, **every once in a while** because we're lazy, and still **other** times because life is **filled** with *disappointments* and *pain*. Yet here is a word of *good news* for us all: our God does **not** sit in the **Judgement Seat** and yell, *You'd better turn your life around – or else!!!*

Instead, God *continually* looks for us, seeks us out, and even tracks us out into the wilderness of life. **Then** God's Spirit **calls** us and **claims** us, **finds** us and **forgives** us, **loves** us...and **leads** us back home... Then from home, he leads out into the world where we're called to love others – so that **they, too**, might hear and believe in this life-giving love of our God.

Here's a last question for you: **When we're children, how do we learn to love? Who teaches us about love? And about God's love?**

Mom, Dad, Grandparent, teacher, friend, pastor, youth director – **someone** leads us to **trust** that, as we can look to another human being for love, even **more** so can we look to our God. So Jesus' command to love God **and** neighbor is **not** a **law** that **has to** be obeyed – *or else!!!* Instead, it's a **gift** that **actually** gives us **life**.

My wife and I have a framed print at home from Alaska that we love. It shows a native child dressed in furs, little hand to its mother's face, looking into her eyes with that *bone-of-my-bones-and-flesh-of-my-flesh* attraction, or...that *chosen-and-cherished-child* **acceptance** and **affection**. The artist entitled the print, simply, *FIRST LOVE*.

I tell you that because it gets right to the **key**, the **cornerstone**, the **very good news** that makes sense of **all** this stuff about the commandments. In First John, chapter 4, we read these incredible words: *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God first loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

So what's the most important commandment...? Love the lord your God with all your **heart, soul, mind, and strength**...**and** love your neighbor as yourself...**because**...that's exactly how God loves you and me. Amen.