

SUMMARY: WORSHIPPING GOD IN THE DETAILS

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Over these past weeks we've been tracing Israel's exodus from Egypt and their movement to the Promised Land, and owning how their journey parallels so much of our faith journey through life. They were a people founded primarily *on the basis of their relationship with God and each other* as opposed to some fairly arbitrary racial or geographic accident of birth. We see their *GOD-PEOPLE-GOD* relationship primarily spelled out in THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

After all the miraculous enormity of their Exodus-experience, the people of Israel were at last free, and perhaps for the first time beginning to 'get it' that it was the God of all creation who had made that freedom happen. Now what they needed was to know how best to worship that God. And so Moses was summoned by God to climb to the top of Mt Sinai where God would tell him. God was to explain how the worship God *most* wants from us has *less* to do with religious ritual and *everything* to do with how we live! **God wants us best to worship God by living lives that reflect God's character.**

Moses gets back down from the mountain he finds that the people have taken matters into their own hands. They'd built this awful golden calf for themselves to worship – worshipping on their terms. Moses was outraged! By building an idol the people were demonstrating just how badly they'd misunderstood this God who was so miraculously saving them...

Will Willimon warns us in his commentary on this passage of how seriously we are to take this incident because, as he writes, **'Their story is our story'**. All God wants of us is our worship. But instead of worshipping God as some inanimate object we create, what God most wants from us is as worship is how we live our lives: the priorities we set, the choices we make, the relationships we build. **While we may think of worship as a time to do religious things – the Ten Commandments point us to our best worship being about Godly living in our everyday lives.**

AND THAT - RIGHT THERE IS THE PROBLEM! Our reality is that actually worshipping God by living ***'by the 10 Commandments'*** is just not possible - not in our own strength, anyway!

YOU SHALL HAVE NO GODS BEFORE ME. YOU SHALL MAKE NO IDOLS FOR YOURSELF TO WORSHIP. NEVER USE MY NAME - GOD'S NAME - IN VAIN.

We do *ALL* those things, all the time. *Of course, not necessarily by casting golden calves or carving little statues to worship perhaps, but easily as dangerous ...as ludicrous!* We elevate what we value most in our outer-ego-worlds to being the most important thing in our lives: *the people and things that we can touch and see, our precious families, perhaps our health, our possessions, our bank accounts...* I'm not suggesting that those things are *unimportant* but **NO**, these first commandments insist, may they never become *the most* important thing! If we are to live lives that express the kind of sacred worship God requires they may never become what we allow primarily to define us – and certainly never what we come to name as our God!

And why? **Because they are NOT God!** Elsewhereⁱ, it's spelt out how they – along with everything else - will ultimately pass away, and when they do we shall be left utterly vulnerable with just 'nothing' at the center of our lives – exposed as having been worshipping idols!

Of course we must delight in our external world – and we do: but we must absolutely reserve our most whole-hearted worship exclusively for the Creator from whom we understand all those things come – the One who is the truest source of it all! That's what these first commandments are saying: have no god's before me – worship nothing else in my name, as it were me - not our children, nor our grandchildren, not our careers, our health, partners – nothing! ***Are you always able to make those distinctions...? I think not. Thank God my faith is not dependent on the commandments that I am able to keep, on what I am able to do for God, as on what the God of all creation is constantly doing for me!***

And then there's **KEEPING THE SABBATH** which is about us living lives that are able, regularly, to rest in the fact that we know we are not ultimately meant to be in control. The Sabbath commandment tells us that while of course we must do our best, we must hold what we do loosely, because we believe that, ultimately, God has got this – all of this – it isn't all up to us! THAT'S why we CAN rest! THAT'S why we MUST rest! ***Do you rest? When last have you...? Are you able actually to let things go? Is that what those who know you best would say?***

And then, **HONOURING OUR PARENTS!** Even when it's difficult to do so because we know that they are wrong! What about those hot-headed arguments? *It breaks my heart to think of some of the unresolved things we may all still be carrying, especially now that so many of our parents have long since died and it's too late to give them the honour they deserve...*

Or that 6th Commandment which is **NOT TO KILL** – anyone! Ever! Not physically certainly, but neither spiritually by becoming a stumbling block for their growth by frustrating them - getting in the way of God's grace, nor emotionally by disrespecting them, or even socially by maligning their reputation, allowing slanderous gossip however juicy it may be to go unchecked...

Then there's those other more detailed commands: **NOT TO COMMIT ADULTERY** – Jesus' later teaching warns against it *even in our hearts...*ⁱⁱ And **NO STEALING** – neither others' goods nor reputations, claiming for ourselves credit that's due to them for what they've done. **NO LYING – NO COVETTING** – of ANYTHING...

The world WOULD be pretty awesome if we were truly able always to live by these 10 commandments but clearly, as I said, it's just not possible to do that - not in our own strength, anyway! Isn't that what we see Paul bemoaning about himself in Romans 7?

And so what then is the point of the 10 commandments if they are so difficult to keep? They emphasize something so deeply beautiful within God's relationship with us - that God cares deeply about the detail of our everyday living. They describe the worship that God craves as being not so much about all the rituals that are elsewhere so carefully laid out for the people of Israel as about the lives that we must lead! Because God loves us – God points out the very things that most hurt us – the things we must do or stop doing in our everyday lives if we are to live away from the guilt and shame and greed that invariably consumes us, and steals our awareness of being precious/loved!

Our living into a fullest possible awareness of ourselves and of God's love *is* the worship God craves from us! By putting any other things into the center of our lives we lose sight of that sacred-honouring essence we were made for, and we hurt ourselves.

And then there is this something else: We thank God that - while these 10 Commandments are good and righteous, and while we DO mostly try to lean into them - we are NOT expected to be made righteous before GOD by anything we are able or not able to do!

We thank God that we are just beginning to embrace how it's by Christ and by Christ alone that we – our truest, God-made, soul-selves, our best-selves – come alive within the wonder of GOD'S love! And that we are then released to live lives that reflect the 10-Commandment justice, mercy, peace, compassion, love – all of which are the hallmarks of GOD'S presence & character!

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ⁱ 1 Corinthians 13

ⁱⁱ Matthew 5:27,28