

Lent 3B 2015 Aurora

This morning I want you to turn to page 317 in the Book of Common Prayer. There you will find in Elizabethan English the Ten Commandments.

Until the 1979 revision of the BCP, when Holy Communion was celebrated, the “Lord, have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy” which we call the Kyrie, was the second choice of words before the Collect or Prayer of the Day. The first choice was the Decalogue with a litany of responses.

(Have you found it in the book?) Now let us read it out loud together. Your part is written in italics. Thank you. You may put it away now.

Most of us learned these 10 commandments when we were children in Sunday school or confirmation class. Once upon a time, they were posted on the front wall of a church on either side of the altar. You can still see these if you go to a colonial era church like the Old North Church in Boston, or Bruton Parish Chapel in Williamsburg, VA.

The Bible tells us these were given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. They are religious, ethical and moral principles for orderly relationships with God and one another. They are clear and succinct, containing straightforward rules of life that are applicable to all humanity. These principles embrace the order of our life with God and neighbor. Notice, that they all use the imperative, “You shall not...” except “Honor thy mother and father...”

The words “shall not” are directed against dangerous corrupting power, not against us least we be naughty. The ‘shall not’ points to God’s protest against the damage of sin in the midst of God’s beloved, redeemed people. By avoiding sin, God’s loving strength and salvation, God’s Grace, triumphantly brings us to wholeness of life and prevents us from being condemned to eternal death.

God longs to be gracious in dealing with us if we would but be obedient and aware of God’s watchful presence. The commandments beg us to be loving, as much for our own selves as for God. Within each of us, in the very secret places of our hearts and minds, Psalm 19 verse 12 says, God know what lurks inside. While love is the motivation for thoughts and actions, we are not to forget, indeed even fear, the consequences of our transgressions. Cheap love, love without commitment debases and degrades.

That’s why St. Paul in writing to the Corinthian in our second reading, calls Christians to order human affairs according to the principles given by God and the example taught by Jesus. Because if we live in harmony with God’s mind and ways we will be redeemed.

Paul warns that this sounds simplistic and foolish to the powers that be and beyond comprehension in the world. Jesus turns the worldly criteria for assessing honor and success upside-down. The Hebrews expected a warrior, a spectacular Messiah while the Greeks sought to discover God through philosophy and speculation. A crucified Messiah was to the Jews beyond comprehension and to the Greeks a god who could be put to death was unthinkable.

The Cross, however, shatters human pride and wisdom. To defeat sin, we need God’s own strength and aid from beyond our selves. Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple in

today's Gospel reading illustrates Jesus' obedience to the commandments. He rejects the nonsense and distractions which have crept into worship of God.

Jesus speaks in the same imperative words of the ten commandment. "YOU SHALL NOT ...make my father's house a place of commerce and trade." By this time only Tyrian silver shekels were ritually proper to exchange for sacrificial animals. Conducting profane business in sacred space was regarded by Jesus as defilement and exploitation.

It is so very hard in the midst of our busy lives. The reports of trouble, tragedy and turmoil around us and in the world weigh heavy upon us. But the lesson to be learned is this: let nothing claim first place in your life, let nothing come between you and God.

God can do this if we remain close to God. We remain connected by our prayers, our sacraments, our attitude and awareness and actions. When we keep a right perspective and see things from the point of view of faith, we will know God's ways are the best ways.

Jesus put it this way: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two hang all the Law and the Prophets."

This teaching is called the summary of the Law. I have observed that most sufferings, dangers, wrongs and hurts happen when God is forgotten and persons place themselves before and above others.

I am sure we could go down a list of troubles in the world or even our own lives and discover things that are violations of the application of the Commandments and teachings of Jesus. When God is removed from any situation, trouble follows, be it the economy, morality, ethics, behavior, whatever. We can be our own worst enemy, let alone what can be done to others. That's why St. Paul says this sounds so foolish to the worldly wise. Maybe the golden rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" isn't so out of date after all.

The secret of how to live and prosper was given to us so long ago. Christ continues to whisper simple words of true knowledge, understanding and wisdom in our conscience and heart. Lent is here for us, not for the Lord. Let us be still and listen. Amen.