

Having this well known passage from Exodus as the First Testament lesson this week has provided an opportunity to rehearse the 10 Commandments. I’m sure most of you could give all 10 – could you say them in order? What’s important to note is that these are given to the people of Israel as a way for them to respond to the powerful and faithful love of God who had just brought them out of the land of Egypt. God was giving them directives – this is the structure upon which they would become a separate and distinct people – GOD’S people.

We will note that the first 4 commandments on the first tablet are about their – and now our -- relationship with God. And the 5th through 10th commandments on the second tablet are about relationships with one another. Most of which seem pretty basic and obvious! But through these directives, God is teaching them, and us, what is good and righteous in God’s eyes. How we can please and honor God. How we show our love and ultimate loyalty to God. All of the 4 about our relationship with God are really about our not seeking to control or locate or limit or use God for own purposes, but instead recognizing the powerful transcendence and “otherness” of God in loyalty and worship.

The other 6 are about our concern for one another – living in right relationship with our neighbors. It’s about integrity, not abusing, or taking advantage of, or making other people “objects” -- once again, for our own gain or purposes. Basically they make clear that God is god, and they are God’s people. The commandments are based on love, a desire for obedience, and to be faithful in honoring God in all things. And, they

would eventually be articulated as the 2 Greatest Commandments: Love the Lord your God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength; and your neighbor as yourself.

There is great value in these commandments, which is, of course what allows them to transcend time and culture, and make them as relevant now as they were for the Hebrew people so long ago.

Obviously, as Christians, we are without question, or option, to live by them. Jesus often referred back to the Law – specifically the commandments – but in a unique way. First, he was always clear to fulfill the SPIRIT of the Law, and not just the LETTER of the Law. To remember the PURPOSE of the commandments. For example, to remember the intention of keeping the Sabbath day holy, and not use it as a reason to hinder someone from being healed by Jesus.

In fact, Jesus raises the bar and closes the loopholes on the 10 Commandments and Law in general as well.

- A lawyer comes and asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus asks, “What is written in the law?” The man answers, “Love God, love neighbor.” “Do this and live,” Jesus replied. When the man pushes it: “Who is my neighbor?” He didn’t like the answer when Jesus told parable of the Good Samaritan. The enemy was deemed the true neighbor.
- Or the rich young ruler who asks how to inherit eternal life. Jesus lists what is on 2nd tablet – quoting those commandments. The man says that he does all that. Then Jesus pushes him too far: “Then go, sell all you

have, give it to the poor...and you have treasure in heaven – then follow me.”

- Or when he confronts Pharisees who claim to follow the commandment to honor father and mother, but then find loopholes to not have to take care of them in old age.
- And of course in the Sermon on the Mount: “Do not commit murder...but don’t get angry either.” “Do commit adultery...but don’t lust either.” And on he goes...

With Jesus, there is great accountability.

- With him, there’s good news of salvation! There’s amazing grace!
- But there are also high expectations on those who wish to be his followers.
- There is this radical call to go farther and deeper than the letter of the Law to the Spirit of the Law.
- To remember that the purpose is to help us live in right relationship with God and with each other.

All of this brings us to Paul in his letter to the Philippians. Paul obviously saw value in the Law and Commandments – they were a major part of the formation of his life, who he was, and what gave substance and structure to his relationship with God. From the perspective of a Jewish person, he was as good as one could be in every sense – from his heritage, to education, to devotion, to tradition, and faithfulness to the Law. He

valued all of that very much. It was all that he was – all he had ever known was of any worth. It's very much like being proud to be an American, or having a particular ethnicity, or graduating of a particular university, or being from a certain family like Daughters of the Revolution (DAR), and so on.

But, all of that was BEFORE he came to know Christ! That was before he came to realize that Christ died on the cross for his salvation. That was before his eyes were opened and he experienced the radical, life changing love Christ had for him.

And now that he had encountered the Risen Christ, and had given his entire life to him, all that he had always valued, had defined who he was, didn't seem as important or of substance. It paled in comparison to the light of Christ now shining in him. It seemed like fool's gold compared to the treasure of knowing Christ. Whatever he had gained or accomplished or benefitted from was nothing compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ! His identity was no longer in his Jewish roots, but in being rooted in Christ! He has experienced God in an entirely new way, and saw life as a whole in an entirely new way because of Christ.

And he was convinced that to be in relationship with him, to become like him, to strive to live up to that higher standard of accountability, even to make sacrifices for him was what truly gave substance and structure to his life...what was of greater worth than all other things.

And so his goal was to press on toward the prize of eternal life THROUGH Christ and WITH Christ. Even though he was no longer defined by the Law, but instead

defined by Christ, the purpose remained the same: to be in right relationship with God, and with others; to live in righteousness through faith, and by following Christ throughout this life, and into the next.

Paul reminds us that it doesn't matter who we are, what we are, where we've been, what we've done in the past. It's not about what we're proud of or ashamed of. It's not how high we've been, how low we've been, how great or how small we've been in our own eyes, or the eyes of the world. It's not our education level... our economic status... our race...nationality... heritage... sexual orientation... political party... or even our religious (or non-religious) background.

Only one thing matters: who we are in Christ! Our goal is clear: to be in Christ, to live for Christ, to strive to live up to Christ's standards of righteousness, to follow after Christ in obedience and faith, and to receive the amazing gift of eternal life through Christ and with Christ.

The Commandments are of great value, and we ought to seek to live by them in all things at all times! But they are nothing compared to the surpassing value of knowing Christ and living our lives for him! There is no greater prize than that!