

Two doses of the 10 Commandments is coming on a bit strong but they are so familiar that sometimes we don't really hear what they are saying to us. Reflecting on the 10 Commandments is particularly helpful, instructive, and challenging (pick one) as we continue our observance of a holy Lent as we practice self-examination and repentance and to read and meditate on God's holy Word.(BCP pg 265).

The 10 Commandments have traditionally been broken down into two sections, the first dealing with our relationship with God, the second, dealing with our relationship with each other – as Jesus said when queried about the most important commandment: "The first is, *'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; 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." (Mar 12:29-31 NRS) But both commandments are really all about our relationship with God.

One of the challenges we face in engaging the 10 Commandments is the very word used to describe them: commandment. They are not rules that you would see posted to prevent people from doing bad things on a subway platform "no spitting, no smoking, no drinking alcohol, no urinating. These are precepts, guideline, or teachings to help us live together in community and as such they are more encompassing and so become more complicated the more we try to legislate them which eventually devolves into legalism, an accusation that Jesus applied to some of the scribe and pharisees. Nor are these commandments required by God in order to receive God's saving grace. God has already demonstrated God's saving grace when God liberated the people of Israel from Egypt. God says as much when conveying these guidelines to Moses. "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt." (Ex 20:1)

God then, is at the center of our very existence. We show that by working on our relationship with God, in worship and in prayer, and by living into these 10 guidelines.

The prohibition against idols can be understood on two levels. The first is that we are not to put anything above our relationship with God or the other commandments concerning our relationship with each other. Idols can mean the pursuit of wealth or fame, addiction, exalting politicians, rock stars, athletes, or religious leaders, chauvinism, especially when we conflate God and America, and even our families. The second is that we can't make God into a concrete idol, a statue, a picture, or even nature itself. We can't put God in a box.

We are not to invoke the name of God casually or falsely or to use it to curse someone. This is not about saying bad words ...except when we involve God in our expression of them, or to convince people of our sincerity when we are lying, and we certainly have no right to claim God's powers against someone else. Any of these abuse the relationship we have with the God who has made himself known to us.

God's call for sabbath and rest is for everyone's benefit and for all of creation as well. Life is valuable and we risk it when we ignore this teaching. Sleep deprivation is a huge issue for our health as is stress, our sedentary lifestyles, the demands of being available 24/7, and the efforts to program children within inch of their lives. When we abuse ourselves we are rejecting the goodness that God intended when we were created.

To honor your father and mother is to make peace with the ties that bind us to all members in our family, remembering especially Matthew's injunction before communion that if your brother has something against you to go and be reconciled before coming to offer your gift. (Matt 5:23-24)

God's injunction against murder has been interpreted to cover those killings not sanctioned by the state, meaning war and capital punishment. However, in the broader sense it forbids any killing because to kill is to take away life a gift that has been given to us by God. As human beings we are always living in the tension between these two understandings. In Matthew 5:21 Jesus expands the scope of the commandments and equates anger with murder. This probably makes most of us guilty at one time or another.

Although the commandment against adultery was to protect the husband, and ultimately the inheritance of his offspring, today we understand it to go ways between the spouses, be they male or female. The Godly Play program reframes this commandment as "Don't break your marriage." There are so many ways that a marriage can be broken, sexual infidelity being only one of them. It's all about relationship and our relationship with God who is present in every marriage.

To steal is not just to take physical property from someone. It can mean stealing someone's livelihood by outsourcing jobs, it can be stealing someone's freedom to participate in society by passing laws that favor one group over another, or their right to be treated as a fellow human being. We have not yet come to terms with our responsibility for enslaving our black brothers and sisters. Stealing creates distrust in the community and disrupts our capacity to care for one another.

The concept of bearing false witness is the language of the courtroom and yet it extends to all our relationships with others. When we bear false witness, we act with malice, we lie, we distort the truth, we tear people down. This is a grievous sin. It assaults the precepts, laws, and understanding that enable the community to function.

Most of us will not succumb to coveting our neighbor's donkey ox or slave, but the phrase "anything else that belongs to your neighbor" (Ex 23:17) can fast forward us into the 21st century; car, house, girlfriend or boyfriend, children, or job to name a few. To covet is to be consumed with desire: it is not merely wishing "I had one of those". It is the inordinate desire that convinces us to steal, to embezzle, to cheat, to manipulate, It is greed unleashed and discounts the abundance that God has showered upon us.

God offered these commandments to us as the bedrock for a just and life affirming community, grounded in our relationship with the divine. God's commandments are neither arbitrary nor harsh but they are certainly not easy. They challenge us make our hearts and minds and bodies conform to God's plan for creation.

As our psalmist says (Psalm 19 v 7-7, 11):

7 The law of the LORD is perfect
and revives the soul; *
the testimony of the LORD is sure

and gives wisdom to the innocent.

8 The statutes of the LORD are just
and rejoice the heart; *
the commandment of the LORD is clear
and gives light to the eyes....

11 By them also is your servant enlightened, *
and in keeping them there is great reward

Amen