

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 8, 2015

What comes to mind when you think of the 10 commandments? A basis for all law? Charlton Heston? An angry God? A court room? "Thou shalt not?"

The first few commandments are summed up simply as, "Let God be God." They call us to receive God's abundance that we may have *all* we need. That we should not accept cheap substitutions for God. That we should not settle for anything less than God in the place of the eternal force of life and energy. We, naturally, understand God in human terms, but we must not suffocate God in our attempts to conceive of God. The Scriptures point toward God but they do not define God. Their language wrestling with God is in the language and understandings of each culture and time period in which each text was written.

These commandments warn us against making a false God as we try to understand God. They also warn us against using God for our own desires and needs. In particular these commandments warn us against using God's name to gain power over our enemies or, worse yet, the poor. According to Exodus 20:7, using God's name dishonestly for selfish reasons is an unpardonable sin. In other words, pay close attention to this!" If you misuse God, you are very, very lost and in danger of causing great misery. To put a religious veneer on greed is a horrible thing. This is why Jesus took the temple chaos and the religious leaders' arrogance so seriously. They were violating the commandments as they took advantage of their positions. Here was a sin against which he had to speak, even if it resulted in his execution. And just to make sure they got the point, tables get overturned and there is a royal mess. The essence of this narrative is that he could not ignore this problem. Of all people, the religious leaders should have known better. Who would speak truthfully of God if they were no longer willing?

And what about the other commandments? They create a foundation for healthy relationships. The call to honor our parents is good both for them while alive and us as long as we live. To honor these whom we know so well or feel we should know so well is an invitation to grace, forgiveness, celebration, and careful listening for the "whys" of their lives as well as the "whats" and "hows." In choosing to honor our parents we grow into the deeper connections to our neighbor and all of creation.

Murder is a pretty obvious breakdown in relationship. Adultery, likewise, reveals a broken commitment to one's spouse in marriage. Faithfulness in marriage is a constant growing edge. Faithfulness is a matter of growing together, nurturing common interests, making room for each other so that the relationship can grow and be strong. As with our relationship with God, it is never too late to invest. Honoring one's partner is what and how we speak to one another. When one speaks, does the other respond or has despair given over to "no response." A broken relationship is not always the presence of conflict—often it is the lack thereof--disengagement. When physical presence is no longer emotional engagement. I see you, I hear you, but I am no longer responding. I have emotionally walked away. I have given up.

Faithfulness is keeping faith. It is, "I believe in you. I believe we have a future together. We have a relationship, probably isn't perfect, whatever that might be, but we are engaged—we are moving together, for one another, with all the challenges of our lives."

Further down the list of the commandments, taking what is not rightly ours and telling lies in order to accuse our neighbor of wrongdoing is a breakdown in relationship. Coveting, desiring, making plans to get for ourselves what is not ours—reveals that things have become more important than people. That we will somehow be more content, happier, or well if we just have the right stuff--this is the height of folly and leads us to hopelessness and despair.

All of the commandments invite us to value the relationships around us and invest in them. If we give up on our relationships even while there is still hope, we will eventually find ourselves looking back in the mirror at the end of the day. The commandments remind us that the only person we can influence and possibly change is ourselves. My problems, hang-ups, addictions, habits, and brokenness will follow me no matter what I acquire or with whom I associate.

The commandments call us to listen to God and to pay attention to and give priority to the variety of relationships which fill our lives. The responsibility is with me. No one else. The commandments remind us of that. May we follow them and receive the hope they arouse.

And in our failures to follow and embrace the life God is giving us, let us remember that it is not in perfect living that we find life and hope, but in Christ Jesus crucified. Not with independent strength, but with mutual interdependence—shared life and mercy—do we overcome and find the life of the kingdom, the life of the ages. Not in succeeding and proving ourselves, but in releasing do we find our truest self and life. Thanks be to God for mercy. Amen.