

## **Exodus 20:1-17** - “God’s Law of Love”

Pr. Kurt A. Van Fossan - Lent 3B - 2021

Our OT reading for today, which includes God’s Ten Commandments, comes up at an appropriate time in our lives in these “United States,” which appears to be united more in the ways of our sinful nature than in the ways of the Lord. I say this especially because the House of Representatives recently passed what’s called the Equality Act, which seeks to heal our divisions and prejudices using the wisdom of man apart from the wisdom of God’s Word. The same wisdom of man is apparent in the “cancel-culture” movement, which smells more like a bowel movement than a rose.

I’m using these strong words since this is and never was a time for the church to bury it’s head, Jesus Christ and His Word, in the sand. Instead its time to “Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore His sacred name.” The key word here is “love,” which is defined in two totally opposite ways when it comes to the wisdom of God and the wisdom of man, especially when it comes to our understanding of God’s Ten Commandments.

I remember a newspaper comic (my favorite part of the newspaper) which showed Moses coming down from Mt. Sinai carrying the Ten Commandments. God’s people, if you remember, were dancing around the golden calf at the time. In the comic the people had stopped dancing, and were looking up at Moses holding the two stone tablets of the Ten Commandments in his arms. Then one of them says, “I think the party’s over.”

Isn’t that the way most people view the Ten Commandments, as a set of rules which are meant to ruin our fun; to prevent us from doing what we want to do? That’s why part of the background of the Equality Act and cancel-culture movement is the increasingly popular teaching that there are no absolute truths, like the Ten Commandments. Thinking that the Ten Commandments come from no higher authority than people like ourselves, it’s thought and being taught in more and more of our public schools, that one person’s opinion about what’s right or wrong/good or bad is just as valid as another person.

What a convenient belief, generated by man’s sinful reason, which encourages everyone to do what they think best—to be their own god and authority. In the wisdom of man this is seen as the more loving thing to do, since the wisdom of man never leads us beyond life in this world. Man’s wisdom leads to a dead end. And if it’s thought that this life is all there is, that there is no God or life hereafter, then why not live and let live. To each is own.

Unfortunately, the sinful nature in all of us is not satisfied with the “live and let live” philosophy when God’s Word and our outspoken faith in God’s Word in any way pricks our conscience (which our sinful nature desperately tries to suppress). Instead, our sinful nature does it’s best to continue to get rid of God’s Word and anyone who speaks it, just like the sin-controlled religious leaders of Jesus’ day tried their best to get rid of Jesus.

By cutting us off from God, our sinful nature makes all of us helpless sinners. And that brings us back to God’s use of His Law when dealing with us and other helpless sinners around us.

When it came to Adam and Eve, before and after their fall into sin, God first revealed His love for them. Before He told them not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil, they knew of God's love and power to give them life and every good thing in paradise. And even after their fall into sin, the LORD let them know of His love, His power and His promise to save them from their sins (Genesis 3:15).

The same was true when God gave His people the Ten Commandments. Did you notice what God said first? *"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* These words reminded the Israelites and us of God's love and power to save them from their enemies, including our sinful nature which seeks to separate us from God forever.

This is important to remember in our struggles with the sin in us, and with the sinners around us. We all need to know, first and foremost, that God loves us, not because of anything we do in obedience to God's Law, but simple because He made us; we're His. That's why God says in our text that He's a *"jealous God."* He's jealous of anyone or anything that seeks to take us away from Him. He wants us back because He knows that He is the only one who can give us what we need for our eternal good.

Therefore, instead of using the law like the church and government of Jesus' day and our society today to "cancel" our enemies, it's important to let people know, like those who are struggling with their sexuality, that we're all the same. We all struggle with a sinful nature which, in a variety of ways, seeks to drive us away from our loving God.

Sin levels all of us in more ways than one. But thanks be to God that, while He hates our sins because they separate us from Him, He still loves us sinners. And He shows us how much He loves us in that while we were still sinners God the Father sent His Son to be born in the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, in order to punish our sins through His death on a cross (Romans 5:8). And through Jesus' resurrection from the dead He assures us of His almighty power as God to overcome our sins, death and all the forces of evil that seek to separate us.

It's in this context of knowing and, by the grace of God, believing in His love and salvation, that we want to know and obey God's will for our lives, which He reveals in the Ten Commandments. This was the people of Israel's desire once they were assured of the Good News of God's love. *"And all the people answered with one voice, 'All the words of that the LORD has spoken we will do'"* (Exodus 24:3b).

This is, as we all know, easier said than done. The more clearly God's laws in the Ten Commandments make us aware of His will for our lives, the more clearly they, like a mirror, make us aware of our sins. This, too, is a good thing because it makes us aware of our continual need for God's loving, live-giving and protecting presence in our lives and in the lives of others. He alone can heal our divisions and prejudices, through the Law and Gospel of the cross.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[Children Sermon] What's one of the good reasons God wants us to obey the Ten Commandments, which includes being nice to each other? Does God tell us that we can get to heaven by the good things we say and do, like climbing a ladder? No.

Because of the sinful nature that we're all born with, we can never do enough good things to get to heaven. That's why Jesus came, was punished on the cross for all the bad things we do, and then rose from the dead, so that He can take us to heaven.

Why, then, do we want to be nice to other people? It's one of the ways we let them know that Jesus loves them. The nicest/most loving thing we can do for others is to tell them about Jesus' death and resurrection so that He can take us all to heaven.