

Hope Lutheran Church

August 8/9, 2015

Sermon Series: 10 Commandments

Leviticus 20:1-7

Pastor Wagner, Pastor *Emeritus* at Hope Lutheran Church

“Becoming the Person God Loves You to Be!”

Dear Friends in Christ:

Our new sermon series on the Ten Commandments, entitled **“Living the Word,”** has a lot to do with *“words”* - words spoken to us...words spoken by us. The Ten Commandments are in fact a very powerful Biblical Word...spoken by God to His people...designed to instruct, guide, and preserve a holy relationship, not only with Him but with each other. The Ten Commandments are not *“Ten Suggestions”* nor are they *“Multiple Choice”* allowing us to pick and choose the ones we like! God is pretty clear in the Book of Exodus about His *“jealous, passionate, zealous and righteous desire for His people to be faithful.”* (Lutheran Study Bible, p. 128) And because He loves us - and because our Heavenly Father knows what’s best for us, then surely we should listen and pay attention when He speaks to us in the Ten Commandments.

When I reflect on my daily life relative to the commandments, well, I fall far short every day, and I know I’m not alone in that outcome. *“It’s so easy,”* as Pastor Puls shared last week, *“for all of us...to bump God from the top spot...to let other things, other priorities, other pursuits, and other people, become more important to us than [our relationship and faithfulness] to God.”* Not only do I not keep Him # 1, but then the 2nd Commandment kicks in and I so often *“misuse God’s holy name and take it in vain!”* *“God help me...God help us”* by the time we get to # 10!

And help us God does, and this is so important for Christians to understand, lest we try to keep the Law only out of obligation or duty or guilt. **Living the Word** is not about trying to appease this “angry bird” called God, but rather seeking to honor Him because He promises in the Word “*steadfast love to those who love him and keep His commandments.*” (Exodus 20:6) Our desire to follow His precepts comes from a deep awareness of His grace and mercy, for He is the Lord who leads His people “*out of the bondage and slavery of sin.*” (Exodus 20:2) This is the God who “*loved the world so much that He sent His One and only Son,*” (John 3:16) redeeming us from sin on Calvary’s Cross, keeping the Law perfectly in our place so that we would be free by faith to serve and follow Him! Claimed to be His children in Holy Baptism, washed and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and “*filled with the Spirit, we seek to give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Ephesians 5:18-20) “*Because He first loved us,*” that’s our motivation for **Living the Word!**

From that perspective of God’s grace and love, I am now ready to focus on the 2nd Commandment: *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*” (Exodus 20:7) But first, a side note: God did not number the commandments in the original Hebrew text. Over the years two numbering systems emerged for teaching purposes in the church; one linking “*have no other gods*” and “*make no graven images*” as the 1st Commandment and then separating “*coveting*” into the 9th & 10th commandments (*Lutheran, Catholics, Anglican*); while other Protestants made two commandments out “*have no other gods*” and “*make no graven images,*” combining “*coveting*” into a single commandment! Got that?

It doesn’t really matter how we number the commands in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5 because the fact remains we’ve

broken them all! It's not necessary to squabble with your Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and other Christian friends when they say the 2nd Commandment is *"You shall not make any graven images,"* and we say the 2nd commandment is *"Don't take the Lord's name in vain!"* There are all kinds of versions of the Ten Commandments, out there, like these, entitled "The Hillbilly Ten Commandments":

1. *Ain't but One God.*
2. *Honor yer Ma and Pa.*
3. *No tellin' tales or gossipin'.*
4. *Git yer hide ta Sunday meetin'.*
5. *Ain't notin' come before the Lord.*
6. *No foolin' with another fellers gal.*
7. *No killin', sept fer critters.*
8. *Quit yer foul mouthin.*
9. *No swipin' yer kin folks stuff.*
10. *Don't be hankerin' fer it neither.*

Regardless of the version or numbering, the challenge is always how to **"Live the Word"** and apply the Ten Commandments in our everyday lives and in our Christian homes.

Certainly, it is a challenge, as Luther's explains in The Small Catechism: *We should fear and love God so that we **do not** curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.*" Not an easy contrast or life style to live out, is it? The Apostle James hits the nail on the head when he writes in his epistle: *"From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers [and sisters] these things ought not to be so."* (James 3:10) How often are we indicted by Jesus words in the Sermon on the Mount: *"You shall not swear falsely, but shall **perform** to the Lord what you have sworn."* (Matthew 5:33) Even the best of the Lord's

best were the worst of the worst, the words of Peter reverberating in the courtyard, “*denying the Lord Jesus with an oath: I do not know the man!*” (Luke 26:27)

If Peter could be such a copout and cowardly follower of Jesus when it comes to “*not taking the name of the Lord in vain,*” do we do any better when **living the Word** demands courage and commitment? Well, let me get on a preacher roll here: We pledge in baptism to teach and model the faith to our children, don’t we; we are confirmed and pledge to be faithful in worship and reception of the Sacrament, don’t we; we join the congregation and commit to “*proclaim and live the word and love of Christ,*” and we make all those promises in the name of the Lord, don’t we? Well, how you doing?

Those folks you interact with at school, work, in social circles and the community who are uniquely different or not your type; immigrants and people from other races and cultures; those who could care less about what we believe or have various political viewpoints and lifestyles, have you ever spoken of them so harshly in your heart that in effect you were pronouncing a curse instead of seeking God’s blessing on their lives? Really? Well, how you doing?

Ever speak words carelessly in your home, without thought or commitment, with pride and prejudice, with a sarcastic edge and cutting tone, cussing like you don’t have any better vocabulary, tearing down instead of encouraging? Ever swear, “*By God, I will do something,*” but you don’t mean it, never did, caught up in this casual terminology that texts OMG without a thought? Ever check your horoscope each day and follow the signs of the Zodiac just for fun, or buy into the politically correct creed: “*It doesn’t matter what you believe, just so you believe?*” Really? How you doing?

Well, that's enough, because it's so easy to lambast each other when it comes to the 2nd Commandment, or any of the commandments. We all need our toes stepped on now and then, but that which really motivates and changes us to **become the person God loves us to be** is to focus always on His love! I know deep in my heart, and in yours, we want "*honor the name of the Lord our God*" by being the person **God loves us to be**. *Loves us to be...frees us to become...saved by grace through faith* (Ephesians 2:8-10) in Christ so that we might **live the Word!**

Just think what a difference it could make this week in our relationship with God and with each other in our homes if we would but "*honor God's name and call upon the Lord in every trouble, to pray, praise and give thanks.*" It's such a wonderful name: "*Redeemer, Savior, Lord, Emmanuel, God with Us, Creator, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace, Good Shepherd, Comforter, Wonderful Counselor, Great Physician, King of Kings, the Way, the Truth and the Life!*" May the "*name of the Lord our God not be taken in vain,*" but free us to **become the person God loves us to be!** Now that's keeping the 2nd Commandment.

God bless us in that journey. AMEN!