

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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October 5, 2008

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time

World Communion Sunday

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³You shall not murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

¹⁸When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, ¹⁹and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." ²⁰Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

Matthew 26:26-32a

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Then Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters because of me this night; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'

But after I am raised up, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

"Thou Shalt Pattern Thou Shalt Not Patter"

They either look at me with that blank stare of absolute denial, or they violently protest what I am telling them. Those are the two reactions. Violent protest or stare of absolute denial. That is the reaction I get when I tell people, and usually I'm talking to youth—it is the reaction I get when I tell them that there will always be someone who not only has the right, but the responsibility to them what to do.

We live in a society where the fantasy is that we are independent and as such there is no one who can tell us what to do. I suppose that works so long as you never get a job, drive a car, pay taxes, or emerge from the cave. It just does not work.

There will always be someone with the right, and even the responsibility of telling us what we need to do. Of such is the Decalogue. The Decalogue, or, the ten laws. The ten commandments, as we most often call them. They have fallen out of fashion, you know.

It used to be—and maybe there are a few who remember it—that on a communion Sunday, the Law of God would be reviewed. It was done as part of the preparation for worship. One was to meditate on the Law of

God. And then also on Jesus' Summary of the Law – “Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind. It is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.”

In some traditions it is still the case that the Law of God, the 10 commandments, and the summary of the law—the two great commandments of Jesus, are reviewed as prelude and preparation for worship. Preparation for worship, we are no longer very good at that either. Realize that such is the purpose of the prelude, it is not for the organist to warm up her fingers for the real performance of the hymns of the day.

No, the purpose of the prelude is to prevent people from talking so that everyone can prepare their minds and hearts for worship. Let me be so bold as to tell you what you should and should not do. During the prelude you should be praying, thinking, sitting quietly and reflecting. You should be reviewing the law of God and getting yourself in a position where you can listen for the presence of God. You should not be talking to your neighbor in the pew, wandering around in the back, or even texting on your cell phone.

See, there will always be someone telling you how to behave and what to do. Always—there will always be someone telling you what to do and not do. Including, but not limited to, including God. God is God and we are not. As such it is the right and the responsibility of God to tell us what to do.

Why? Why does God do that? Just to be bossy. Just to throw God's proverbial weight around because God can tell us what to. God is not the parent who retorts—“because I told you to, just do it.” God is more the one who would retort—“because I love you, that is why you are to do it.”

But we resist—we resist any suggestion that anyone of any anything can tell us anything that we do not openly want or openly choose. Why?

Well, frankly, because we spend a whole lot of our waking hours playing God over our own living. “I’m going to do what I want to do when I want to do it in the way I want to do it, and that is not going to change unless you convince me otherwise.”

Idolatry at it’s very best. The idol is not some golden calf but we ourselves.

Think about it—remember the stove. Do you remember the stove? “Stay back, it is hot,” is what Mom would say. Remember that? “Stay back, it is hot.” She knew. But at some point you resisted.

At some point you touched. Why? Because our tendency is to patter not to pattern.

Yes, that is right—our tendency is to patter, not to pattern.

Whether it was the stove or something else, that first time you touched I would bet the patter was going off in your head, but you touched anyway. You had to touch because you had to be in charge. You had to be the decider—you had to take control—or so you told yourself. All the while, the patter was going off in your head.

What’s the patter? “Stay back, it is hot.” “Stay back, it is hot.” “Stay back, it is hot.” In the time it took to reach that finger out and touch there was that little tape—that little tape recording—that patter went off inside your head about a dozen times.

And what did you do? You ignored it. It was just patter. Just Mom saying it again, and again, and again—“stay back, it is hot.” You knew the words, but you did not hear them. They were just patter.

Of such are these old commandments. Even before they were read from the book of Exodus this day, I would bet that were I to give you pencil and paper, and a bit of time you could have made a list of the 10—for sure you would have come up with 7 or 8, but most of you could have come up with the 10.

Sure, we can muster the words. We know these commandments. We have been to this mountain before. We can rattle them off. A few of them we may need some help on the first few words, but given the prompt the patter begins. We have it down.

Yes we do...we have the words down—buried so deep in our memories that they are just that, buried. It’s patter.

In fact, do you know where that word comes from—patter? It is a shortened form of the Latin term “paternoster” which is really the title for the Lord’s Prayer. In medieval times prayers were learned and recited in Latin, and they were recited so rapidly with no regard for the sense of the words.

Just say it over and over again without really hearing any meaning in the words. That is patter.

These commandments that we probably first memorized in Sunday School—I know it used to be in the curriculum at least twice a year—these commandments have been reduced to mere patter. Primarily because we tend to not to like God to interfere with our being God of our own lives.

And if we are to take these commandments in—then it certainly does interfere with that.

Such is the call of the day.

To take these commandments in—that is the call of the day. ...to take these commandments in us in a way that we may not have taken them in before. Are they ancient? Yes. Were they given to Israel? Yes. Does Jesus summarize them into two? Yes. Are we living under grace and not under the law? Yes.

Does any of that nullify these commandments of God over our lives today? No.

No, not at all. Indeed, hear me clear here. God does not give these laws to the people in order to control them or reign them in or to punish them---no. God gives these commandments as a gift in order to have the boundaries of what it takes to live in a healthy way. They are the shape of living in a healthy community, and living in communion with ourselves, with each other, with society, and with the whole earth.

They are the shape of living in a healthy way with ourselves, with each other, with society, and with the whole earth. They offer for us a pattern of how God calls us to live out the image of God that is within us.

God is always drawing us in. Yes, indeed, always drawing us in. God is never pushing us away—God is always drawing us in. And God is drawing us into this pattern of including us in love and grace and mercy.

When I think about patterns I think about that thin little tissue paper that women used to use to pin to fabric and cut around it in order to make a dress that would fit.

In order for the dress to come out the way they wanted it to—they had to follow the pattern.

I don't think it is rocket science here either. If we want our lives to come out—if we want a good fit—we have to follow the patterns.

And there they are—not in some verses locked in time—but in the way in which we claim those commandments of old today as our own and live by them—they become the patterns that cause us to live into the joy of the Lord.

When we connect ourselves into those patterns—when they become more than just patter, more than just words on the page—then it points us toward God and we are drawn up and into the presence of God.

What happens in our living the pattern is that we grow in God's love and we are able to change, and become the change in life that those we share the world with need.

Oh it draws us to the table. There is the pattern—that Jesus takes bread—and tells us “this is me broken for you.” And then the cup—he tells us—“this is me poured out for you.” When we take that in and realize that we are so connected—we are connected here at the Lord's table, we are connected in this world as it comes to the table today—and we are connected to the heart of God.

God is not off in the distance coming up with the next thing to tell us what to do. God is here—in you, in me, in us—drawing us into the pattern of love and hope. God is here—in you, in me, in us—drawing us into the pattern of grace and mercy and peace.

Will we be drawn into the pattern for God? Will we be the pattern for God in this age? That is what you are—the pattern for God in this age. So live it. Thou shalt pattern! Amen.