

Pastor Jon's Sermon from March 3, 2024 based on Exodus 20.

It is good to be reminded of the 10 Commandments!

When Jeranna and I have given our kids clear instructions and boundaries in our household, they know what to expect and can hopefully thrive. However, we haven't always done that just right as parents.

I compare the 10 commandments to our fenced-in back yard. When we let our dog out, we know where he is, and he can do his business in peace. He can run and play safely. But if we forget to close the gate, he has a field day in the neighborhood... and won't always come back when called. It is an anxious situation. In the fence good. Outside the fence... who knows.

The rules and boundaries we do set are because we love our kids and want to keep them around as long as possible. God gave the 10 commandments as a gift so the Israelites in the wilderness, so when they entered the promised land (where others were already living by the way) they could live peacefully among them.

However, now with what is happening in Gaza, Israeli hostages still not released, utter destruction of homes and buildings, hunger, and lack of adequate medical care for Palestinian civilians, I see these commandments through a different lens... the lens of longing for no more killing and peace and dignity for all people.

Martin Luther included the 10 commandments and their explanations in his small catechism. He wrote the small catechism primarily for use in households of plain people so the basics of Christianity could be taught.

The first commandment, I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other God's before me. God wants to be number 1 in our lives. God wants our full trust and belief with all our heart. Luther said, "That to which our heart clings and entrusts itself is, I say, really your god. Our God is a jealous God. And the most common idol on earth according to Luther is money and possessions.

The second commandment is You shall not take the Lord's name in vain. I learned this as a kid while roofing with my dad. I hit my thumb with a hammer and used the Lord's name. There is a right way to use God's name. We aren't to use God's name superstitiously or to curse, swear, lie, or deceive. But to call on God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

The Third commandment is Remember the Sabbath Day and Keep it holy. The sabbath for Luther wasn't a specific day or a time of the week. And he didn't say anything about not working. Luther saw sabbath as a day to hear God's word and the preaching of it, to keep it holy or set it apart to gladly hear God's word and learn it.

The first three commandments are about our relationship with God. The next 7 commandments are about our relationship with our neighbors.

The fourth commandment is "Honor your father and mother." Luther says, "We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in authority, but respect, obey, love, and serve them." Again, the commandments were given as a gift so people could live together peacefully in community. When we honor and respect our parents and authority figures, assuming they have your best interests at heart and don't abuse you or their power, it usually goes better for us. Honoring your father and mother could be listening to them the first time when you are young or taking care of them in their older age. That's holy work.

You shall not kill. Luther reminds us that we should not hurt our neighbor in any way. This could be physical or with words. But instead, we are to help them in all their physical needs. This is the one I struggle with killing between Israelis and Palestinians.

You shall not commit adultery. If God doesn't want us to commit adultery, what is God saying about marriage and relationships. God wants all relationships, marriage or dating to be life giving and built on trust. In marriage, we should honor and cherish our spouses and the vows we made. What does this mean, "We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

7th commandment. You shall not steal. Our love and trust in God says we should not take our neighbor's money or property or try to get them in any dishonest way. Instead we are to help our neighbors improve and protect their property and means of making a living.

Eighth Commandment You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. Do not betray, slander or lie about our neighbor, but defend them and speak well of them. Don't gossip negatively or talk behind people's backs. Philippians 4:29 says. Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, only what is useful for building others up. Speak of people in the best possible light. "If you do not like my family and friends, I do not want to hear anything about it. They may mean nothing to you, but they mean everything to me." –Forrest Gump

9th Commandment. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. How many of you like to go on Zillow or Realtor.com and look at houses for sale. Is there one that is as good as ours?

10th is like it. Not coveting your neighbor's wife, manservant, maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbors.

How are you doing at keeping these commandments? If you feel convicted, then they did their job. The Law shows us our need for grace and forgiveness. Luther meditated on them daily, which drove him to the foot of the cross.

This is where grace comes in. When we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Today we receive this grace in holy communion and in God's word. If you have a broken heart over things you have done or left undone and don't want to do them again, in the name of Jesus you are forgiven.

Amen.