

04102020 - 17th Sunday after Trinity 2020

Exodus 20:1-4,7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19; Phil 3:4b-14;
Matt 21:33-end

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer'. Psalm 19:14

In the English language, the Hebraic Ten Commandments are barely more than 300 words in length. As a people, the human race had written, by the year 2000, 32,647, 389 laws! And that, according to J. John [author of 'TEN – Living the Ten Commandments in the 21st Century'] was 20 years ago, before Brexit and a pandemic! Just how are we supposed to live without confusion?

In Exodus, we listened to ten commandments which life has shown us are impossible to live up to for numerous reasons. Why is that? *Let's call them 'The Big Ten'* are not confusing. They are clear and strong. They are only 300 words!

Maybe it's the imperative which puts us off! A command! We rarely hear commands today; maybe we don't want it said to us. I know, I don't! I would rather be loved into doing something than commanded. This means I make mistakes but I also learn the 'awe of fear', as opposed to 'shaky-knee'

fear. The 'awe of fear' creates respect and love, the 'shaky-knee' fear creates guilt and shame.

Maybe, then it's perspective. If we come at the Big Ten from the point of view of 'commandments', they reveal how lazy, egotistical and horrid people can become. If, however, we come at them from being 'loved into living life' then that's a different story, as you'll hear in a moment.

How many of the commandments do you think the wicked tenants broke? The first is obvious; the slaves were attacked or killed and the heir murdered. But they also coveted the landowner's property, stole from him, misused God's name, gave false testimony, dishonoured their parents, likely made idols and possibly ignored the adultery and Sabbath commands too. What was the result? Chaos and a returning landowner who punished the wicked tenants and changed how he would operate in the future.

When the wicked tenants, I mean the listening law teachers, realised Jesus was speaking to them through the parable, they met him with stony silence and shaky-knee fear. Jesus saw through their twisted values and imperative driven hearts and gave them the weighty challenge of the cornerstone.

On the other hand, I read words written by Dorothy Day: '*Love casts out fear.* [that's shaky-knee fear]

'Even the most ardent revolutionist, seeking to change the world, to overturn the tables of the moneychangers, is trying to make a world where it is easier for people to love.' 'Making it easier for people to love'. Isn't this how God operates? Isn't this a Big Ten perspective?

As co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Dorothy Day moved away from a 'Bohemian-journalist' lifestyle into a life offering care and hospitality to the workless and low paid workers of North America in 1940's, until she died in 1980. In spite of her own life's sufferings, she worked towards creating an invitational and inclusive world where it was easier for people to love themselves and therefore others.

By default, she ended up living the Ten Commandments. She did not say, 'Oh well, I broke that commandment when I was younger so there's no going back'. Instead she found that following Jesus; loving God with all her heart, mind, soul and strength and her 'far-away and very-near neighbour' as herself, meant acknowledging her own brokenness, asking for repentance and starting again, this time walking with, not away, from God. This was how she made it easier for people to love. You and I can do this too. Maybe take some time to ask God how you could make it easier for people to love themselves and

others in this coming week. Those whose privilege it was to attend the Harvest of Gifts had the opportunity to practise this last night.

If God's overarching plan was, and is, for people to be loved into living a Big Ten life, it won't happen overnight, it's not going to happen looking backward but it will start to happen when we hear Jesus say, 'Look at me! Do what I did! Love people into Life!' This parable was Jesus' invitation to become perspective-led, not imperative driven, despite the consequences for his own life.

Listen to the Big Ten you can live:

Love God : Watch and pray

No idols : Rejoice in the Lord

No Swearing : Listen and speak well

Keep Sabbath : Work, rest and play

Love your neighbour : Be courteous and kind

No violence : Be gentle and patient

No adultery : Be faithful and brave

No stealing : Be thrifty and fair

No lies : Tell the good news

No envy : Give generously

Lord Jesus Christ, when scorn and shame besiege us and hope is veiled in grief, hold us in your wounded hands and make your face shine on us again, for you are our Lord and God. Amen.

Preparation Reading

J. John '*TEN: Living the Ten Commandments in the 21st Century*'

[Victor]

Tom Wright – '*Matthew For Everyone Part 2*'

[SPCK]