

TAKE TIME OUT - *Pastoral Retreat*

Sunday Scriptures: 4th October 2020 **Revd Janice Morgan**

Exodus 20:1-20 *The Commandments of God*

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²"I 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. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject Me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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 labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work-you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident on your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. ¹²Honour 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 neighbour. ¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour." 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.'

Message:

To keep God's Commands we must first know what they are! The Ten Commandments are particularly important for God's new nation because they constitute the guidelines of His Law. These commands were intended to direct His people to meet the needs of each individual in a loving and responsible manner. God demonstrates here that His Law is a blueprint for living in harmony, both socially with each other and divinely with our Creator. The people of God are expected to read, mark, inwardly digest, and reflect on the Ten Commandments of God. It would be wonderful if humanity needed no laws or rules to live in harmony, but sadly, human nature is corrupt and needs help in achieving any such unity. Therefore, the Commandments of God are just as important for the Body of Christ today. It always amazes me to discover how few people in the church know any of God's Commandments, let alone all of them! When I was working with teenagers in a church school, I would ask if any could recite the Ten Commandments. Very few hands went up and even then they were only able to name the odd one. I would set them a task to learn them and offered a reward of maltesers if they could recite them in order at the next lesson. It is amazing the effort a teenager will make when there is chocolate on offer! It was a monetarily expensive exercise for me but priceless in terms of increasing their understanding of God. *How well do we know the Ten Commandments of God?*

The Israelites had just come from Egypt, a land of many idols and multifarious false gods. Since each god represented a different aspect of a person's life, it was common to worship them all in order to have the most fulfilled life. So, when God told His people to worship and believe in Him, that wasn't unusual or hard for them to obey. He was just one more god to

add to the list. But when God said, “worship no other god than Me”, that was a completely new concept and hard for the people to accept. But if they didn’t learn that the God who led them out of Egypt was the One and *only* True God, they could not be His people – no matter how faithfully they kept the other nine commandments.

We can find it just as difficult to accept today, perhaps even more difficult in a world that only accepts what they can see, touch, taste and hear. We too may be holding on to other god’s and, on reflection, discover idols have subtly crept into our lives. Money, fame, work, pleasure and even family, can skew our focus when we concentrate on them, rather than on God. We may not have set out with the intention of worshiping these things. However, if the amount of time they occupy in our thoughts increases, they will develop into false gods that ultimately control every aspect of our lives. Keeping God as the central place in our lives prevents us from falling into this trap and protects us from engaging with evil intent. Remember, the devil is ever prowling around, looking for the weakest spot to attack! (1 Peter 5:8). God’s law is for our protection. True contentment is only found in God, because only He can give security and meaning by supplying all our needs, both physical and spiritual.

Knowing God’s commandments enables us to keep the House of God pure. By the time of Jesus, most people looked at the Ten Commandments of God’s law as the means to salvation. They thought that to physically obey every law was their ticket to eternal life, but as we now know, it proved impossible to achieve through works alone. Human desire corrupts, whether greed, power, jealousy or influence, as we see in Jesus reaction to the corruption of the temple (John 2:13-22). God’s people were challenged then, as now, to take the world out of God’s house and cleanse the Body of Christ, the Church! Even right at the beginning of His relationship with His people, God had given them the one command that summed up all Ten “You shall love your neighbour as yourself: I AM the Lord!” Leviticus 19:17-18, 34. Now, as Jesus stood on the foundation of the old, He reminds all that through Him this command is given new meaning, “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” John 15:12-17. If we are faithful to this one command we will, by default, be faithful to all the others.

Wisdom only comes from knowing God. The birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are the foundations of the Christian faith. There are those who cannot accept the Word of God as written, simply because they cannot understand some of its statements. But who are we to place ourselves above God and think we must understand all before we believe? Faith is not a physical, material, intellectual or academic entity but a spiritual witness to Truth, without which all seems nonsense (1 Corinthians 1:18-19). To know God we must place our trust in Him, particularly when we do not understand. Discernment comes through prayerful obedience the Word of God and adherence to His commands through belief in Jesus Christ His Son. The wise know this to be the greatest Truth of all. “Moses 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.’”(v20) This assurance to those who believe and try their best to obey God’s will and purpose stands as firmly today as it ever was. Thanks be to God. **Amen!**

Hymn/Song: A New Commandment *Can be found in SoF 22 & MP 1*

A new commandment I give unto you,
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.

By this shall all folk know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.
By this shall all folk know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.

Poem: Jesus said, Go! ©Janice Morgan-May 2011 Based on [Matthew 28:19-20](#)

Go! Jesus said, make the world My disciples
Teach them obedience to all I command.
Show them the way to live by all my scruples
Give them the armour with which they can stand.

Go! Jesus said, and baptise all the people
Teach them the meaning of God's only Son.
Show them the power of the name that is Jesus
Give them the Spirit that makes us all one.

Go! Jesus said, with the love of the Father
Teach them of grace and forgiveness of heart
Show them repentance and life in abundance
Give them a choice and help them make a start.

Go! Jesus said, for I Am with you always
Teaching you God's will and purpose for all
Showing you how to continue in My ways
Giving a witness that's true to My call

Prayer:

Father God, bless us with the desire to read, mark, inwardly digest, and reflect on Your Commandments. Jesus Christ, bless us with belief in You as Messiah, God with us. Holy Spirit, bless us with faith to accept the Word of God in its entirety, especially when we don't understand. **Amen!**
