

## You Shall Not

### Exodus 20: 12-16 (Common English Version)

<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> Do not murder.<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Do not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> Do not steal.

<sup>16</sup> Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.

This week, we are looking at commandments four through nine. If we remember a few weeks ago, we talked about how the context for the commandments is now the Israelites are freed people. God has brought them out of Egypt and they are beginning a new life with a new identity. Where once the covenant was with Abraham, now as a whole, as a community, they are in a covenantal relationship with God. The Israelites have been set free from the powers of the Pharaoh and other empires. They are now being invited to be active partners in the kingdom of God.

Please hear me say that this new life to which the Israelites are now called is not a free-for-all where anything goes. Their covenantal relationship with God changes everything. From the words that they say to their interactions with their neighbors, this covenantal relationship takes on new meaning as they live it out in their day to day lives. Because, now they are working to help bring about the

kingdom of God here on Earth and in the kingdom of God, relationship and community are at the center of everything.

The people's covenantal relationship with God shapes their awareness. It opens their eyes to a new way of viewing everyday life. They are now called upon to embrace an understanding that our actions and our words create ripple effects, both good and bad. The people's covenantal relationship moves them beyond simply seeing themselves as individuals. They are now a community. They are now connected to everyone and to everything in God's creation. What they do affects others. This change in the people's relationship with God calls them to sustain community by building relationships with others. All of this is background for our conversation about commandments 4-9, which are:

#### 4) Honor your mother and father

This commandment has some baggage, especially for those who do not have the greatest relationship with parents. The better understanding of this commandment to honor our care-givers. The act of honor draws us out of ourselves, and turns us towards another person. It gives reverence to the wider connections in our community. To honor someone may mean to give respect, but the deeper meaning of this commandment comes in how we live so our actions reflect back on those

who first loved us, on those who first cared for us, on those who first showed us grace. To honor someone is to recognize and continue their legacy of kindness and care."

We also need to realize that this commandment does not stop after "father." It goes on to say: "so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you". " Because of the covenantal relationship, the people represent God her on Earth. They are called to reflect the character of God in all they do and say, that character being: steadfast in all things; faithful from one generation to the next; and abundant in love and grace. The fourth commandment connects the whole loving our God and loving our neighbor as ourselves understanding. We love God so we share this love with others so that others will know who we serve: a God who has named us and claimed us and loves us more than we will ever know.

(I'm doing the next ones together because they all start out with "You Shall not" or "Don't")

So commandments 5-9 are:

Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.

I'm not going to go into much detail with these because they are pretty obvious in their meaning. "This particular grouping of commandments prevent actions which break down bonds of community. They are based on the understanding that the life of the community is more important than our individual actions." When people ignored these commandments, relationships are damaged. Trust is broken within the larger community. And hurt and hate take over.

All these commandments we are mentioning today can be summed up for us as people of faith as a way for us to call attention to the people in our lives. They are a call to be mindful of how we use our time and energy to nurture our connections and build our communal life." These commandments ask us where our focus truly is. Are we only worried about getting ahead? Do we care who we hurt in the process? How do we treat the people in our lives? And not just the people who are a part of our families, and certainly not just the people who think like us, who act like us or who look like us. Together, this particular grouping of commandments serves as a reminder that we are so much more than individuals.

We are one, joined together through God's grace and God's love, working to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

I have to tell you that I assumed this sermon would be the easiest one to write in this series. After all, most of these commandments are self-explanatory except I am realizing that these may be the hardest ones for us to follow. What I mean by this is that this section is filled with a bunch of You Shall nots but somehow, as a society, as a culture, and yes, even as people of faith, somehow, we have twisted them into a bunch of it is okay if you do. Because we will just make excuses for your behavior and look the other way. Or worse yet, we hold them as standards of behavior for the poor, for those on the margin, for those whose skin is brown and black but we ignore them when it comes to the behavior of the rich and powerful.

As I sat down to write this particular sermon, I kept coming back to a statement one of my professors said about the Ten Commandments. She said, if we are really wondering what's behind these statements, all we have to do is realize that they prevent us from living backwards because when we act out and live backwards, we get the word evil.

Again, this week, I don't have all the answers and yes, I like to think that there is more good than evil in this world. But as we review these particular commandments, commandments which call us to community, which call us to

relationship, which call us to be attentive to how our words and actions affect others, as we review these particular commandments, I cannot help but wonder what would happen if we truly did change the conversation around them, what if we made our conversations about the commandments less about morality and more about a moral vision which guides our actions and words. What if we as people of faith reframed the narrative surrounding these commandments, changing it from simply being about right and wrong to being about our call to be active partners in the work of the Kingdom of God. What if we allowed these commandments to push us to see everyone as created in the image of God, invited them to help us see everyone as our neighbor, what if we embraced their challenge to live out an understanding it is not about me and my wants but rather it is about all of us, together in community, working to bring healing and wholeness for all of God's people.

Because maybe, just maybe, then we would really see that these statements are ways we can repair what is broken in our midst. They are ways for us to become the people God created and calls us to be...people who work to bring about a vision of Shalom here on Earth just as it is in Heaven, people who work to bring about a vision of peace which stands in contrast to the vision of power and might which rule our world. Maybe just maybe if we truly begin to see these statements not as moral codes but rather as ways we can build community, ways in

which healing and wholeness can come to fruition, not just for a select few, but for all of God's children, then maybe, just maybe we will truly begin to live out what it means to be Beloved Children of God, not living backwards and creating evil but rather living in the fullness of the Kingdom of God here on Earth just as it is in Heaven. May it be so. Amen.