

3.7.21 L3 Commandments to Cross

- A few weeks ago when I made my weekly Sunday stop in the confirmation class, I saw that they were studying the Ten Commandments
 - And there in class I said something that probably surprised them, and which may surprise you too
 - I said, that if they FOLLOW all the commandments, this would NOT get them into heaven
 - And I also said that if they BREAK all the commandments, that this would not send them to hell
 - So what good are the commandments?
 - If they don't save you, why bother?
 - And if the penalty for breaking them doesn't do eternal harm, then again, why bother?
- Well let's go back to the scriptures
 - In words that are easy to gloss over or miss, the commandments are introduced in this way: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery... [Exodus 20:2]"
 - That little verse is the setting, or the context for the commandments
 - Remember, God had heard the cries of the descendants of Abraham and Sarah who were enslaved and suffering in Egypt
 - God then sent Moses to demand that the Pharaoh, or Egyptian king, let the slaves go free, but he refused
 - Then after many plagues and much suffering and even death inflicted on the kingdom of Egypt because of the hard heart of the Egyptian king, the Pharaoh finally let the people go
 - Led by Moses, the Israelites were saved by the parting waters of the sea, but when the Egyptian army pursued them and went in after them, then God's people watched from the dry shore as the waters of the sea then closed in and drowned their pursuers

- Led by the cloud of God's presence by day, and the pillar of God's fire by night, the newly freed slaves went into the wilderness, where despite their fear of dying of thirst or hunger, God fed them with manna, quails, and fresh water
 - Finally, despite their complaining and sometimes blatant faithlessness, God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses, and Moses in turn gave them to the people
 - So freed from slavery, saved at the Red Sea, fed and watered in the wilderness, God HAD ALREADY SHOWN GREAT LOVE AND CARE for the descendants of Sarah and Abraham whom God had long ago promised to love and protect
- The commandments, you see, ARE NOT a way to earn God's love and favor – God HAD ALREADY demonstrated that love and favor time and time again. No the Ten Commandments were God's gift to a people whom God already had chosen, loved and saved!
 - The fact also is, that the commandments were NOT given as some kind of universal law for everyone to follow – the commandments were given by a loving God to God's chosen and beloved people
 - So the first several commandments call the beloved people into relationship with the God Abraham and Sarah and their rescuer from Egypt by having no other gods than the God who saved them, by honoring this God's name, and by setting aside a day each week to worship this God
 - Then rooted in love for the God who had already loved and rescued them, God's people were then called by the commandments to love one another – by honoring parents, by not killing, by not committing adultery, by not stealing, by not lying, and by not desiring the spouse or property of their neighbors
 - Yet the sad fact is, the people back then, the people to come, and people here now, are NOT very good at loving God or loving neighbors
 - If keeping all the commandments perfectly had been the way to heaven, frankly heaven would be empty

- And if breaking the commandments had been the way to hell, then frankly hell would be full to the brim
- Instead, the commandments do help insofar as they are kept, to help people better love God, and to better love each other
 - Loving God is GOOD, not murdering is GOOD too!
 - But seeing that the commandments cannot be perfectly kept by anyone including you and me, we are ultimately forced to rely upon God
 - We are forced to rely upon the God who chose imperfect people like Abraham and Sara
 - We are forced to depend upon the God who set free and saved people from Egypt no matter how much they complained or acted falsely
- And so for generation after generation of people who cannot entirely keep the commandments, and who will always fall short, this God did an amazingly foolish thing
- This God became humble, this God became human, this God became Jesus the Christ, and this God through Jesus took not the strongest, but took the weakest path, and turned himself over to all people – both Jews and Gentiles – so that at the hands of all people Jesus died on the cross.
 - Yet in that path of weakness...
 - Yet in that path of the death of Jesus Christ...
 - Yet in the foolishness of apparent defeat, God took our sin to the grave, and from the broken-open grave God promised the free gift of forgiveness and life
- Long ago in giving the commandments God said, “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...”
- Later Saint Paul wrote about the humility of this same loving God, saying that all people want signs and wisdom, but “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God [1 Cor. 1:18]”
- And now on the after-side of both the commandments and the cross we can say – this is the Lord our God who brought our spiritual ancestors out of slavery in Egypt, and this same God in the cross of Christ saved us by bringing us out of slavery to sin and death – and now in response to all the amazing and abundant love already shown long ago to the saints, and now

shown to us, let us hear in the commandments the call to love the God who saved us, and also then to love our neighbors