

Sunday, June 20, 2021 – The Ten Words 2nd Commandment
“Honoring God’s Name”

Exodus 20:7; 2 Corinthians 6: 1-13

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

We continue on with our Ten Words series today. A couple weeks ago we kicked off by looking at the Hebrew version of the “first word,” also known as an introduction to the commandments and saw how the whole foundation of the commandments is God’s **love**, that the “what it looks like to live as my people” instructions comes *after* God saves His people to bondage and slavery in Egypt. The implication for us today is that these words are God’s eternal moral law – it is absolutely God’s holy will and expectation that we live in this way, and we are responsible for our sin when we do not – but Jesus saving us predominates. And then last week Pastor Brad walked us through idolatry – anything that we fear, love or trust more than God... even very good things – can become a god to us. Today we come upon the Second Commandment: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.”

Now, when Jesus sums up all these words, “The Ten Words” he groups them into two master commandments. The first and greatest is: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.” He continues, “The second is like it – love your neighbor as yourself.” Traditionally in our Confirmation instruction we apply this to say commandments 1-3 have to do with the relationship between humans with God, and commandments 4-10 have to do with our relationships with each other. But, just like all the parts of the Trinity are involved in what God does, each of the commandments *involves* an aspect of each of these great commandments.

We usually think of the Second Commandment as the “don’t curse or cuss” commandment. We don’t use God’s name in a flippant way that suggests He isn’t actually holy and the almighty God of the universe. We certainly don’t use His name to ask Him to render people ill, dead or damned, as is uttered behind many a steering wheel. We don’t use it frivolously to swear, “Oh my,” this is the best coffee I’ve ever had. We don’t call upon Him to “be our witness” – that is, to sit in the witness box, like in a courtroom and testify to a truth... unless it is of a matter of utmost seriousness... like being sworn in at court or speaking marriage vows, or an oath of service such as in church work, the military or law enforcement. And we don’t muddy the waters of His name by combining Him with or replacing His name

with the names of spiritual mediums for guidance – séances, horoscopes, astrologers or fortune tellers, to name a few.

There's wisdom to be found in the Old Testament Hebrew practice. When God revealed His name to Moses, with His voice coming from the bush that was on fire but did not burn, the name was often written but rarely spoken. The name was spoken before Pharaoh in Egypt – “Tell him that Yahweh – I am who I am – has sent you.” The name was *whispered*, exactly once by the High Priest, one day a year, on Yom Kippur with the blood sacrifice for the sins of the people was brought to the Holy of Holies at the temple, God's throne room on earth. Other than that the name of “Yahweh” was skipped over and replaced by everyone else when it come up in the text with the word, “Adonai,” which means, “Lord.” Jesus' death and resurrection makes our speaking the name of Yahweh possible – but still, always and only with the utmost reverence.

That's all right, good, true, and necessary to say in a sermon about the Second Commandment. But there's a too-often forgotten connection that comes into play with the Second Commandment. It's that second “great” commandment that Jesus spoke to summarize all the commandments, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Part of the way that we can misuse the name of God is by the way we relate with our other people.

See, God has saved us. When? How? In Lutheran churches we most often think of baptism. This is the place where everything Jesus did, all the good gifts like forgiveness and eternal life that He won, are handed to us personally, by name. We are adopted into the family of God – in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” And now, you have His name – just as an adopted child takes on the family name of their adoptive parents. You represent God's family everywhere you go, in all your relationships, by the things that you do and say... all of which finds its roots in what you think about. In every single role and every relationship that you have throughout your life you are not just representing yourself. Paul says, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” You represent Christ. You're a Christian – a “little Christ.” That was the mocking term the Romans used for us, which early Christians adopted with pride. You're meant to embody “Jesus with skin on,” you represent the family of God in every single interaction and relationship. You're telling people something about how God is – for better or for worse, in truth or in falsehood. When we are true to who God has made us to be and the salvation won for us,

consistent with a member of God's family, we portray God well. When our thoughts, words or actions don't line up and we fail in our roles in our families, at work or school, at church or members of our community at large – **we are saying something to the people around us about God that is false – whether we sin against them or they simply observe our sinful behavior toward others.** It puts a lump in your throat, doesn't it? Every second we have breath we are *always witnessing*, saying something about God to the people in the world around us.

Have you ever had an honest sit down with someone who isn't a Christian and heard their stories? I have, many times. There are various stripes of people who aren't Christians. Some follow other belief systems and always have. Some weren't raised with any religion and it just isn't something that feels particularly relevant. And yes, our witness and example matters there. But there are also people to whom it especially matters. It is those who are vehemently opposed to religious belief or, at the very least, to "organized religion." What I've often found in those conversations is that when you really just sit and listen and show some empathy, ask some questions like, "When did you start feeling this way?" and they figure out you aren't going to be combative but really listen, you'll usually discover deep pain. This is often a person who was **hurt** by the Church. And I use that term "church" in the widest possible sense – hurt by Christian people. It might have trauma at the hands of God-espousing parents. It might have been unloving or ugly behavior not in keeping with Jesus' teachings within a church community – and that can be between people in the church or with people outside the church. It might have been a moral failing of a religious leader, mentor or example. Often the connection is personal – they or someone close to them were put down, abused, rejected or dismissed by a person of faith or a church community that wasn't upholding the neighborly witness application of the Second Commandment to "Honor God's name" or of Jesus' Second Great Commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself." If there has ever been an ounce of truth to the term "hypocrite" being ascribed to Christians, it is because that word above all others is the one-word name for the sin of misusing God's name by being a poor witness and example to God in whose name we're baptized: the Father who adopted us, the Jesus that we follow, the Holy Spirit who is making us into something new, different and holy.

There is a more excellent way. Today we're wrapping up an adult Bible study on 1 Corinthians. It was a terribly conflicted church, wracked by disunity, competing factions and lack of love and forgiveness

for each other. As I talk to other pastors, read pastoral journals, blogs, studies and polls we're finding that churches around the world have been infected and afflicted by the struggles of the world around us. Add in the stress and polarization around pandemic protocols and you set up conditions to create little Corinthians of congregations all over the place. No church is immune – including ours. No one is immune – including me. Our epistle reading from 2 Corinthians today sums up this issue well. Let me read it to you again – listen carefully, meditate on it, with a posture of, “What does this mean for me, my life and my witness?”

“1“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2 For he says,“In a favorable time I listened to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3 We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4 but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5 beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6 by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7 by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8 through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9 as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything. 11 We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted in your own affections. 13 In return (I speak as to children) widen your hearts also.”

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13, “Love covers a multitude of sins.” Nowhere is that more true than on the cross. As Jesus is being crucified He prays for His persecutors – “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing.” We can never perfectly emulate Jesus’ example on this side of Heaven – but we do practice that forgiveness. Remember – He saves you *before* He commands you how to live as His people. It happens at the beginning of our worship. It happens in communion. It happens in private one-on-one times where people confess their sins with their pastors, or when Christians are working out their differences – with Jesus at the center – between each other.

Friends, this is the appropriate use of God's name! Love covers a multitude of sins. We have the forgiveness that He won for us when we do not know what we are doing! A witness that calls upon God in every trouble, that prays, praises and gives thanks! A witness that humbly, honestly falls to our knees before God and says, "I messed up, I'm sorry, have undeserved pity on me, a sinner!" That humbly, honestly says to those we've sinned against and made a poor witness toward, "I was wrong." An example that lives that reality out between us and God and us and each other, that is anything but hypocritical or self-righteous, but speaks the truth that God is God and we are not, and we desperately need His help to love others in ways that speak truthfully about our God.

We call upon the name of the Lord – that same name into which we're baptized – and He forgives us. "I am who I am" is with us. And He helps us to witness rightly to who He is – so that by our words and our example people will see Jesus. In His name we pray, Amen.