

St Margaret's Tylers Green

Sermon Series on the Ten Commandments

No 10 About Covetting.

Ex 20.1-21 Isaiah 61.1-3

This morning, we start our series on the 10 Commands. Their purpose is holiness and not happiness. Holiness is the process whereby the Lord peels away the unhelpful layers with which we surround our hearts & lives - the things that suffocate us. Holiness is important. God thinks it is, thus we read in our passage from Isaiah "... that you may be oaks of righteousness". Why? "... for the display for his splendour". That is holiness.

The 10 Commandments are in 2 sections. The last 7 are about social relationship - murder stealing, parents etc. The first 3 are quite different as they are about our relationship with God ... No other Gods, no idols - not taking his name in vain. Jesus brilliantly summarised those 2 parts as 'love God and love others'. So we start at 10 with 'Thou shalt not covet' and end with those that relate to our relationship with God. They are at beginning of 10 commandments because they are most important and end our series for same reason.

The Dictionary definition of coveting is "to long to possess, to desire eagerly" and covetous as "avaricious, grasping" There does not seem to be too much wrong with the first as there is nothing wrong with desire to possess. That is what has driven mankind to succeed all these centuries. But this good desire, that God put in us, has been twisted, distorted and warped. So it is in the Lord's aim of holiness that He seeks to straighten that out. So, for instance, I was given a Book at Christmas "Speeches that changed the world". Most of those speeches related to wars - Charles 1st - Churchill - Roosevelt - Hitler - Stalin. These were where rulers & nations coveted the land, resources and wealth of others, and got themselves to the point where they were willing to take it by force. Covetousness!

Nearer home, the huge national industry of advertising often taps into the rich vein of our covetousness. The neighbour washing his old banger of a car and looking longingly at his neighbour's new car. The young man embarrassed by his old mobile phone. All tapping into you wanting what you neighbour has, not because you need it but because theirs is newer, bigger or better. The advertising creates in us a dissatisfaction with what we have and we become dissatisfied. And we pay for it. I read recently that something like £500 of the cost of a small ford car is advertising.

I want to cite one famous Old testament case study on Coveting. King David sees Bathsheba bathing on the roof, he covets her and they sleep together. She gets pregnant and because her husband is away at war David brings him back on a pretext, hoping he will sleep with his wife and cover the sin. Uriah, however, is a good and noble man. As a commander he will not sleep in bed with wife while his men are out in the field in danger. So David has to arrange that he is killed in battle. In breaking 10th Command David is forced to break commandments 6, 7 and 9 as well.

I myself remember as a child getting found out telling a lie but sticking with it. The deeper I got into it the harder it was to get out. We are dealing with lying next week. But that is how sin works in us, like weeds in garden. They start slowly but grow up and the longer you leave it to deal with them harder it is until they choke out the good plants.

The root of covetousness is selfishness. That sense that we are unhappy and if we just have that one more thing we will be happy. I remember saying to my father as very small child "if you buy me that I will never ask for anything ever again". Fortunately father was wise (and a Scotsman). It was a lie, but I believed it with all my heart. We know it is a lie but we fall for it every time and in fact the more we have often the unhappier we are because in getting the thing we want, instead of satisfying it simply opens us to wanting even more.

Actually I have not changed very much. I am still often like that inside. I repeat, God's concern is for my holiness not my happiness. That is what I need. The holiness produces something better, more enduring, than happiness. It produces contentment.

So I close with words of St Paul, an example to aspire to. He wrote this to the Church at Philippi - "... for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have

learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Phil 4.11

Elsewhere Paul wrote, "for me to live is Christ, to die is gain." Phil 1.21 So our defence against covetousness is to be self aware. A Godly wisdom that recognises the emotion within you for what it genuinely is. God will hold that mirror to you if you ask him. But like so many mirrors, what we see it is not usually very flattering.

Secondly seek all the ways to holiness. Let God shape your desires, not the world of advertising. So stick with this series on 10 commands, look into the mirror of the Bible every day. Stay with your Home Group and make your prayer to ask God for holiness, not happiness. Holiness is massive challenge to us. It is not for fainthearted. It is about self sacrifice and commitment to God, really loving God and then others, more than we love ourselves. Imagine if we were truly holy people here, it would be stunning, not obsequiously monkish, but lovingly and truly open to others. Always we have the example of Jesus ... "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2.1-11

We have a long journey ahead of us!

Rev'd Mike Bisset

No 9 About bearing false witness.

Jeremiah 8:19-9:6

Here we find a Prophet and preacher with a loving heart for the people crying out for the pain of their loving Lord who is suffering for the faithlessness of his children. "Everybody", he says "Is full of lies and deceit."

"Everybody?" we say to ourselves, "Why is he so insistent on including everybody? Surely most people are honest. Surely it's only the minority who are dishonest." Yet, if we think about it, we know that the speaking of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth is NOT something we do habitually all the time.

We might be tempted to say that the Ninth Commandment is concerned only with the events in a court of law – Do not bear false witness against your neighbour. Christians, however, have tried to follow the advice of our Lord, Jesus in looking for the essence of the law – Do not lie. Martin Luther wrote:

This Commandment seems small, and yet is so great, that he who would rightly keep it must risk and imperil life and limb, goods and honor, friends and all that he has; and yet it includes no more than the work of that small member, the tongue, and is called in German Wahrheit sagen, "telling the truth" and, where there is need, oppose lies; so that it forbids many evil works of the tongue. First: those which are committed by speaking, and those which are committed by keeping silent.

Today we are overwhelmed by the information society. We wade through a sea of words, facts, allegations, advertisements, arguments – pumped out every minute of the day and night by a sophisticated media that seems to be more interested in manipulating out knowledge and belief than in the truth.

It seems that we have suffered a loss of truth in the public domain of politics and government – barely a week goes by when the media find someone else that has been "economical with the truth". The media even try to trap people in public life into indiscretions so that they can vilify them – all in the name of NEWS ! And the media are expert at this. Lately we have seen an example of a junior minister labelled with the immortal phrase, "Green shoots of recovery", a phrase put to her by the interviewer and then attributed in the so-called news to her.

Even in our own daily work and domestic life, we seem to be enmeshed in a net of lies:

"Darling, of course you are not fat !"

"Probably the best lager in the world"

"My, your looking great today"

"The chocolate with the less-fattening centre"

"This won't hurt a bit", said the dentist.

"It wasn't me, Sir! I wasn't there – anyway, nobody saw me."

Let's try to look at the nature of these lies:

Firstly there's the outright malicious falsehood, designed to damage someone else or to protect me from being found out. Truly this is bearing false witness.

Then there is the mistake. The statement is false and may be very damaging but we did not know it was a lie. Am I culpable? Do I have a responsibility?

Then there is the lie of omission, the lie of silence. I know the truth – that person was there – did the deed – but he was a friend of a colleague or was a member of the gang, the brotherhood; and so I keep quiet.

Then there is the lie of innuendo, the misleading statement. I need to lead people away from the truth and so: "Have you noticed how nervous so-and-so has been this week. She is leaving the office much earlier than usual."

All these lies are dangerous. They damage other people and they damage ourselves. Perhaps they are most dangerous when we begin to lie to ourselves – to believe that we really were not there, that we did not really witness the crime.

And finally, of course there is the "White lie", the one that is meant to encourage or to protect that person. Surely this is all right, surely it is necessary, sometimes to indulge in a kind falsehood.

But we know that one falsehood can lead to another, we have to tell another lie to protect the first and so it goes on – soon we become enmeshed in the web of deceit! Sooner or later someone is damaged.

Why do we find it so easy to lie?

Jesus put it very clearly in John 3:19-21

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."

Right from the beginning we seem to have the propensity to do the wrong thing. When talking to parents seeking baptism for their children I often try to show the nature of humans compared to that of God by quoting the events in the garden of Eden. Adam and Eve have eaten the forbidden fruit, discovered they were naked and were ashamed. As they hide from God he asks if they have eaten the fruit. The man says:

"That woman you put in the garden tempted me and I did eat."

"Typical MAN", says the wife and we agree.

"That snake you put in the garden tempted me and I did eat", says the woman, showing the same wish to shift the blame. This is the beginning of the blame culture! And the beginning of lies – it soon leads to the first murder of Abel by his brother Cain and he lies by evasion when accused. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

God, on the other hand, is very different. God is perfect in every way. Could we put our trust in an imperfect God?

Could there even be an imperfect God?

Everything about God is true.

He is perfect in JUSTICE, LOVE and TRUTH.

He says to his children, "Be perfect as I am perfect!" What a command!

How can we live a life of truth when our lives now are woven in a garment of lies?

Perhaps it is significant that, last night one of the channels on the TV screen the film, "Liar, Liar" in which a lawyer has a son who is granted the wish that his father must tell the truth for one day. Naturally this causes chaos for him and all his doings for that day. Far from proving, however, that it is necessary to lie, the character discovers his love for his son and has an earnest desire to be as honest as possible for the rest of his life.

I believe that is what GOD WANTS FOR US - that earnest desire to change and live in peace with our Lord. We call it repentance. We take our broken and contrite heart to Him and he will lift us up. He will help us to live our lives in His ways. His word in Holy Scripture gives us clues. We look at the life of Jesus, the only perfect human being. He never lies, He cannot go against His own nature.

"I am the way and the truth and the life", He says. John 14:6

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" Matthew 5:44

When Jesus talks to people, sometimes in their distress, sometimes in confrontation he always speaks the truth and it is instructive to see how he does it.

When Nicodemus visits Him at night and says he is a great teacher and performs wonderful miracles and that God must be with him, he startles Nicodemus with the challenge: “You must be born again”, and this leads to a conversation in which the seed of truth and life is sown in a Pharisee and one of the Sanhedrin.

When Martha confronts Him after the death of Lazarus: “If you had been here, my brother would not have died”, he carefully and lovingly leads her to a deeper faith in the resurrection – and then, of course, brings Lazarus to life again! When the Roman soldiers hammered iron spikes through his wrists, in the midst of his pain, he was true to his nature and prayed for them: “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”

Are there any principles that we can gather to help us to live a life of truth?

J John in his book entitled “TEN” suggests six of them:

Beware the power of the tongue

We have heard about this in our reading from James’ epistle.

Remember the price of lying

It may be that billions of pounds are lost to the revenue every year by those who falsify their tax returns and this has its effect on everybody in higher taxes, reduction in social services but most of all the in damage to the individual who does it.

Shun gossip

We have all experienced the playground gossip at school as we wait for our children. Characters are murdered, schools are denigrated and rumours fly around. Earl Wilson once said: “Gossip is when you hear something you like about someone you don’t” Gossip can cause real damage in many ways and needs to be confronted. “Are you sure?”, have you checked it out?

Be open

Although there are things that need to be confidential it is helpful to be as open as possible with our friends and people whom we can trust. Openness helps us to be honest.

Be an encourager

I believe this to be the key to the difficult task of truthfulness in everyday life. How to avoid the little lies, the white lies and still to help people to rise above adversity, love themselves a little more. The key is to “THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK” and we can use the word “think” to remind us of five questions:

T Is it True?

H Is it Helpful?

I Is it Inspiring?

N Is it Necessary?

K Is it Kind?

I believe that there is a wealth of wisdom in this acrostic and reflecting on each of these questions is a teaching in itself.

And finally, be true to your word

Perhaps the most challenging of all.

I would like to read Psalm 15 as a prayer:

Let us pray.

LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?
He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his fellowman,
who despises a vile man but honours those who fear the LORD,
who keeps his oath even when it hurts,
who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
He who does these things will never be shaken.
Amen

David Carter

No 8 About Stealing

There was a farmer who had a field of melons. He was doing pretty well, but he was angry because someone would sneak into his field at night and take his melons. After some careful thought, he came up with a clever idea that he hopes will scare the thief away: He writes a sign and puts it in the field.

The sign says: "Warning: One of the melons in this field has been injected with rat poison"

The next day, the farmer goes to have a look over his field. He's delighted because no melons are missing but he sees there's now a sign next to his. So he walks over to take a look. The sign says, "Now there are two."

Steal, purloin, filch, snatch, pilfer, nick, hook, swipe, lift, pinch, heist and so on. There seems to be an unending list of ways to describe stealing. And so as you might have gathered by now our theme for today is the 8th commandment – 'thou shalt not steal'.

As I was preparing this sermon the government were announcing that latest crime figures. The British Crime Survey reported that whilst overall violent crime was down by 3%, Burglaries and other kinds of theft were up by 4%. So it would seem that theft is alive and well.

Theft is an insidious thing! The key point to make is that wherever there is theft, there has to be a victim. The implication of any kind of theft is that we do not love our neighbours but wish to do them a dis-service. It seems to me that we can break stealing down into four areas.

Firstly and perhaps the most obvious is when we take the possessions of others. I want what is yours and I'll take it!

You may recall in the story of the Good Samaritan that the victim was attacked – mugged- by a band of robbers; " Jesus says, "A man was going down from Jericho to Jerusalem, They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30). Clearly here was a victim of a violent attack and theft – something that perhaps very few of us will experience.

But, in a way, the priest and the Levite also stole from the man as well. Their attitude was, "*What is mine is mine, and I will keep it.*" In effect they stole from this unfortunate man the care which they should have given to him, the compassion they should have shown him. Passive theft is still theft.

And then of course there is the theft of items from work, the pencils, the paper, the photocopies, the private telephone calls and so on. This acquisitive theft seemingly innocuous adds to the costs of a business and ultimately to the cost of the product or service.

Mike lent me J John's book on the 10 commandments (I must remember to give it back to him!). In it J John says this. '*We need to be brutally honest about theft. In almost no sphere of human life is there greater deception than in the area of stealing. Very few people are prepared to look at themselves in the mirror and say 'I am a thief, I have stolen. We use a sea of words that obscure the truth. We borrowed it, we acquired it, we helped ourselves, it fell off the back of a lorry; objects are surplus to requirements, software accidentally gets loaded onto the computer, equipments gets creatively recycled. However soothing the alternative words sound, all stealing is stealing'.*

Second, we steal when we *take advantage of others*

This can range from tradesmen charging for work that didn't need doing, salesmen making false claims on products through to financial advisers giving advice that maximises their bonus – rather than the income of a customer. It can also be about considering whether buying the cheapest food or cheapest clothes is exploiting those who struggling on low earnings in third world countries...another kind of theft perhaps.

Thirdly, we steal when we *take the ideas of others.*

When I was at college there was a saying about essays and dissertations - *if you steal from one source, its plagiarism; from two sources, its research.* Friends of mine who teach in secondary and higher education tell me that there is a growing problem of essays being sold on the web to students to pass off as their own work.

Indeed there are web sites where an expert can write the essay specifically for you. If you pass anything off as your own it's stealing and by copying CD's, downloading 'pirate' copies of music, using photographs from the web without payment or permission of the owners this too is theft.

An article from the Catholic Herald in March last year:

Priests told: 'Thou shalt not nick sermons from the net'

Young Catholic priests who download sermons from the internet to save themselves the trouble of writing their own have been told that they could be prosecuted for plagiarism.

The warning was issued by a leading Polish priest, and has been taken up by Catholic newspapers around the world.

Father Wieslaw Prichenza claims that, on many Saturday evenings, there is a surge of visitors to websites offering ready-made sermons. He believes that the users are internet-savvy young priests who cannot be bothered to compose their own work in time for Sunday service.

The trend has even been picked up by parishioners who download the same sermons and take them to church so that they can follow the priest's words.

Next Sunday you'll find my sermon on [www.....](#)

Fourth, we steal when we *take the reputation of others*

It is very easy to damage the reputation of someone by repeating or spreading ill founded rumours. The media seem to enjoy damaging reputations by publishing inaccurate facts about them. Before you say anything negative about any person, ask yourself first, is it true? Is it fair? Is it necessary? To take the reputation of others is to steal the goodwill that they have built up over their lifetime.

So what now?

It's difficult isn't it? As we move around in this society of ours stealing seems to be endemic. It is so easy to fall into the trap of adopting the norms of the world because stealing is so commonplace. J John uses the word integrity in the context of 'a means of living a life that God seek for us'.

The dictionary definition is:

Steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code.

The state of being unimpaired; soundness.

The quality or condition of being whole or undivided; completeness.

Whole, undivided, complete – these seem to me to be words that I ought to strive for in my everyday life.

If we are fully committed to our faith then material success should not be the highest value in life- our relationship with God is. It is a struggle for many Christians but take heart because the Bible is there to strengthen us.

Jesus warned his disciples: *"What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26).*

Material success must be a means to an end. God has given us these possessions to help us serve him. If we value God more than possessions, then stealing will not be part of our life.

Paul tells the Ephesians - *"He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need" (Ephesians 4:28).*

We are encouraged to invest wisely. In Jesus' parable of the talents (measures of money), he commends the men who doubled their investments, while criticising the man who did not (Matthew 25:14-30).

When our need is greater than the resources that we have then this is the time to pray and ask God to help. The early Christians gave to the common good of the community, and their resources were *"distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:35).* As we work hard, invest wisely, and trust God, we acquire things as God wishes. Then we will have no need to break the eighth commandment.

God has blessed us with material possessions, so that we might use them to help others in his name. He gave the Samaritan a donkey and money, so that he was able to give to the man in need. We are to do the same with the 'donkey and money' that he has graciously given to us.

If I value my neighbour more than his possessions, I won't steal what is his. In fact, I'll give to my neighbour from what is mine.

For our own spiritual integrity we need to acquire possessions and use them as God directs. If we do this then we can't help but keep the eighth commandment.

And finally can I give you a prayer from the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 30:8-9

Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the LORD?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.

Amen

Rev'd Derrick Carr

No 7 Adultery

Readings: Gen 3.1-13 Eph 5.25-33 John 8.1-11

How did I end up with adultery? I think we are OK. I think we will find something good and affirming from it this morning and some principles we can apply. Remember, the purpose of the 10 Commands is holiness. But what has that to do with a very practical command on adultery. Well you will know when I have finished! There is a story of a vicar who was preaching through the 10 Commandments and he had been berating his congregation on 10th Command because someone just that week had stolen his bicycle. 3 weeks later he is preaching on adultery when suddenly remembers where he left it!

So this morning - 1. What is the problem with adultery? 2. why? and 3. what can we do about it?

1. What is the problem? There was a Cary Grant movie on TV this week. Cary's wife goes off with Robert Mitchum, they presumably commit adultery, but Cary loves her and takes her back. They live happily ever after, we assume. If only it were that simple - So what is the problem? In a couple of weeks' time we will gather our 21 wedding couples together for our wedding workshop and as part of that we will talk through the very heavy marriage vows they will make to each other - to love, cherish, sickness and health, rich or poor, better or worse, love and cherish to death do us part. The issue is that adultery strikes at most precious and deepest relationship we have - that of marriage. It is apposite that we are considering adultery this morning when next Saturday is Valentines Day. It is interesting to note Valentine's story. He was a priest in Rome in C3 and he was marrying Christian couples in a Christian ceremony when that was against the Roman law. He was told to stop but he continued and was martyred. A demonstration of very practical love for God and the couples.

We read in the Lectionary this week about love in 1 Cor 13 - to summarise that passage- Love is - patient & kind - not envious, boastful or proud - not rude, selfish or easily irritated - forgiving - looks not for what is wrong but what is good - It protects, trusts, hopes & perseveres Love is practical. It is a decision of the will. That is how marriages can stay together. Both parties actively, intelligently and consciously deciding to do loving acts as they share their joy and celebrate their love. That is not a tingly feeling it is an act of the will. The Marriage service says Marriage is a gift of God in creation through which husband and wife may know the grace of God. It is given that as man and woman grow together in love and trust, they shall be united with one another in heart, body and mind, as Christ is united with his bride, the Church. The gift of marriage brings husband and wife together in the delight and tenderness of sexual union and joyful commitment to the end of their lives. It is given as the foundation of family life in which children are born and nurtured and in which each member of the family, in good times and in bad, may find strength, companionship and comfort, and grow to maturity in love. Marriage is a way of life made holy by God, and blessed by the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with those celebrating a wedding at Cana in Galilee That is how adultery gets into top 10. It strikes at very heart of the deepest trust, the most precious thing we have, the relationship between a husband and wife. It is so deep that the two 'become one flesh'. It is so holy that Paul says it is like the relationship of Christ to his bride the Church. Of course, adultery brings with it many of the other commands. It starts with coveting, involves lying, and it has the effect of stealing someone's love and killing something lovely - a marriage. Adultery is not the unforgiveable

sin. In Christ nothing is irredeemable. In Him we can find reconciliation and forgiveness even though that might be extraordinarily painful and hard for one or both of the partners. But an understanding of the sanctity of marriage explains why it is in God's top 10.

2. Why? Just one shocking word about sex. We have been skirting around it all morning, like the elephant in the room we are avoiding. I want to be positive. I remember as a child I did wonder where babies came from. But rather than ask I thought about it worked out that couple decided wanted baby and it happened. Well God created something much less logical much more messy. I am going to embarrass you now - sorry - it is some theology. A theological question. Where is God when a married couple are having sex? Answer: he there saying 'go for it'. So you think when close the bedroom door you shut God out. It is a strange thought that God is part of that but it is the most holy & sacred thing you do, sex between a husband and wife. It is the most intimate joining of 2 bodies, hearts and souls. What comes about is the miracle of new life and that is also holy. That also why Christianity sees that the only right context for sex is within the safe, secure loving committed public relationship of marriage. And that is why the Church is so hung up about sex. We have a high ideal of sex. At that moment the two become one flesh, in some way forever linked and joined. So prostitution is a horrible desecration of that most holy of signs between two people and pornography is the commercialisation and cheapening of the same. That is why adultery features in top 10. Because marriage and sex are fantastic and an unbelievably special precious and holy gift from God. It is so precious, delicate and powerful that it is only safe within the confines and the protection of a marriage relationship. Sex is very powerful & affirming when used lovingly in context of marriage. It is massively powerful for good. And of course, as we see around the world, it has equal capacity to curse and destroy. But that is a reason to proclaim and affirm all that is good - that is our task. In the passage from John about the woman caught in adultery, Jesus stops and writes in the earth. Maybe at that moment he gets a glimpse of the countless marriages, the countless pieces of trust, ripped apart by adultery and he is gripped with the anger, grief and pain that God feels. Again, it is not unforgiveable sin, Christ has the power to redeem and forgive. Jesus tells the woman to go, but sin no more.

3. Some practical stuff to finish. A defence against adultery and this relates to our own marriages five 'Rs' Respect your husband or wife. In the reading from Ephesians husbands were told to love their wives as themselves and wives must respect their husbands. We all know marriages where that respect has been lost and it is very sad. It is said that a marriage can be buried by a lot of little digs. Responsibility - take responsibility yourself. Not take responsibility to blame the other person. In our reading from Gen 3, God asks Adam, he blames the woman, the woman blames the serpent and the serpent does not have a leg to stand on. Take responsibility for your own actions. Relate - talking time together. I tell wedding couples that having 'match of the day' on in the background does not count as quality time together. Which leads on to ... Romance ... next Saturday is Valentines Day and there is someone here to whom you can safely give vent to your romantic side - so do it! Resolve - remember 1 Corinthians 13 about love being an act of the will more than a tingly feeling Ask God to help you in each of these areas. Pray "Lord help me to love my wife/husband" He hears those sorts of prayers. Protection against the 7th of our commandments.

Rev'd Mike Bisset

No 6 About Murder

Readings ... Gen 4.2-10 James 1.12-18 Matt 5.17-26

As we look at issue of murder it is very timely for I was reminded that one of my predecessors at HTP was murdered with an axe - that 14th C but you cannot be too careful - it may indicate a trend! And of course the last person hanged in this country - Ruth Ellis shot David Blakely who lived down Hammersley Lane - shady folk down there! Want to look briefly at murder and then divert to the wider context of what Jesus is teaching here. If hoping for a structure and logical reasoning this morning - sorry! Another week!

So murder Much debate about whether kill or murder - The word used in here in usual OT context means the premeditated intentional act - if it is murder then it allows for killing in time of war - if kill then it outlaws any killing and you are pacifist and against death penalty - there are in OT provisions for when you accidentally kill a person or animal. I was 22 yrs in MOD - and we did engage in 2 wars in that time - so you will know where I am coming from - but I side on murder otherwise you run very quickly into the Lord instructing the people of Israel to fight wars and penalties for certain offenses being stoning. And I believe there is a godly rage at the genocide in Rwanda and the Congo and on and on that we cannot stand aside and watch

- 375 refs in Bible to God being angry - just as had the good Samaritan turned up as the chap was being robbed he would have intervened - to do that - in reality means force - not a pacifist.

Also not vegetarian - murder is people not animals - why? - answer leads us to theological principle God's image is the thing that sets us apart from the animals - are the highest point of God's creation - somehow we bear his image and that makes us holy - priceless and precious to him - we have the ability to think outside of ourselves and God has given to us the potential to consciously acknowledge and know him - all life is a miracle and sacred in that sense - but human life is different.

Principle here - universal principle - we are made in G image and life is holy - we thus do not have right to take it. So this is the other side of the coin and this is what gets us into ethical complications over abortion - genetic research and all those areas that science is taking us into that we have never been before So the ethical principle you have to consider with many of these is at what point the foetus or human genetic material bears image - becomes a life with a soul - not time here but fascinating discussion. At this point worth remembering too that Moses and David - the 2 most significant OT figures both committed murder - Moses so humble God dealt with him face to face - face glowed - David = 'man after my own heart' - In NT - St Paul was there and approved of murder of Stephen. God gave his son to be murdered on the cross - so God knew what he was talking about when he put in this Command. So those some issues - murder or kill of any sort - what about abortion and genetics - God used murderers - theological issue is that we bear his image and that sets us apart - esp wrong to murder clergymen

What is there here for us - closer to home - couple of things here Back to us being made in God's image and how God sees us - there is an implication here - the world values the slim, the blond- beautiful, strong intelligent, wealthy, famous, talented - devalues - deformed - ugly - deranged - obese - handicapped - the poor - disadvantaged - but that did not appear in God's criteria at all. SO ... however you perceive yourself - you are special and precious to God - you may in denying that be killing yourself - and that is you murdering someone that God considers the highest point of his creation - special and loved. Second - we can kill others by what we say and do - we can kill marriages in the same way - adultery kills trust - lying kills respect - next week honour father & mother to stop us killing our family - you can kill churches by rumours and grumbling. So ponder whether killing yourself by what you tell yourself about yourself - or killing others by what you say, do and treat them.

Finish - long finish by taking us away from murder if I may into what J was getting at in the passage I read - you see when J talking in passage from Matt about murder and God seeing what is in our hearts so that if you think murder, say 'you fool' you are guilty In God's sight. J then goes on roughly through the 10 Commands and brings his light to them so Murder think it that is as bad - in that Chapter to Adultery & divorce- if you think adulterous thoughts that is as bad - Oaths and how we use the Lord's name - OT idea of an eye for an eye .. now it is to forgive - Heard it was said love your neighbour & hate enemies ... I now tell you love and pray for all - How we give - how we pray In each of these J pointing out that it is thought just as much as action. So up to then - I can think what I like but so long as I do not actually do it I will be OK - This is the point - this is what I had written in my Bible beside this passage - 'we have to submit even our thoughts to God's penetrating scrutiny' - Hmmm! - this is not actually NT - story of Cain and Abel - first murder - the problem with Cain's offering was not the offering itself but the motivation behind it - it was an easy thing for Cain whilst Abel's offering was costly to him - God saw his heart - so what think about that - like being watched by CCTV - never get away - Big Brother - so maybe it is scary -

But I have got to the point where I do not want to ever be off the Lord's CCTV screen - I need help - I do not want to hear the words 'sorry I was not watching' that does scare me - see he loves me - passionately - at this point of preparing as I pondered on Tuesday morning - I had a picture of child playing in a busy playground - and just like you watch your children or grandchildren in the playground at the park - so in this picture the child's parent was there - it is an intensely loving watch - child may be totally absorbed in what it is doing - occasionally it will look across - know you are there - occasionally frightened and call out - and you will rush across and say 'it's ok - take my hand I will bring you down - child runs off to next thing You are the child - this earth is the playground - I do not want to be that child in the playground on my own - that is what so many around us are - so sad - and such a fantastic gospel we have - we can say - 'that's my dad over there - others say 'did they drop you off?' and you say 'no they stay all the time' ... Pray

Rev 'd Mike Bisset

No 5. About Honouring Parents

Today we're continuing our series of short studies on each of the Ten Commandments and we've got to Number 5.

"Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you".

Yes, I know that we've got somewhat out of order but, today being Mothering Sunday, there is some logic in looking at this commandment today.

One of my favourite evangelists is Selwyn Hughes, the founder of CWR, the Crusade for World Revival. Sadly, Selwyn Hughes died just three years ago but he told a story about his uncle who was the pastor at the local chapel in Fochriw in Glamorgan. It seems that his uncle, the pastor, was taking his grandchildren on a day trip to the coast. They were all sat on the coach and an atheist came and sat next to the elderly pastor – it was the last available seat on the bus. Throughout the journey, the pastor's grandchildren would constantly come to where he was sitting to see if he needed anything – another drink, something to read, something to eat. Eventually, the atheist said to the pastor....."the respect your grandchildren have for you is absolutely wonderful. My grandchildren don't show me any respect at all". "Think about it" the pastor said. "To my grandchildren I am one step closer to the God who created the world, who both created and loves you and me, and who sent his son to die for us all. As far as your grandchildren are concerned, you are merely one step closer to the apes".

This story, in a brutally unsubtle way, gives out an important message – and that is, being the people of God has a profound impact on how we treat other people, especially those closest to us. It stands in stark contrast to the posters you see that say "Be nice to your children; they'll choose your nursing home" or the one that says "Honour thy Father and Mother; they haven't written their wills yet".

Before we go any further I think it would be helpful to consider the original audience to whom this commandment was addressed. As a youngster I grew up having been taught that this commandment was addressed to children only and it is true that Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians that we heard earlier, is talking specifically to young people. Nonetheless, all those people at the foot of Mount Sinai when this commandment was first delivered included both young and old and neither God nor Moses made any distinction. So where does this take us? I think this leads us to the inevitable conclusion that this commandment is about family.

Now, you can choose your friends, you can even to some extent choose your enemies but you can't choose your parents. This is what makes being "family" potentially hard work. You know the sort of thing..... take today for instance, Mothering Sunday – which Mother are you going to have over for lunch; which set of in-laws are you going to spend Christmas with. However, I have to say that I have been blessed with great parents. I am grateful for a warm and easy-going pattern of upbringing, for the security and the affirmation I have always received, and for support when it was needed and the fact that my parents were able to let go when the time came. That's not to say that it was always a completely smooth ride – I'm sure that as a spotty teenager I could be as difficult and misunderstood as any adolescent trying to make his way in the world and, being the eldest of four, I guess that to some extent I was the trial run, as it were.

So, did the Israelites some 3500 years ago need this commandment more than we do now. Well, the answer is no. Admittedly, the Bible is full of stories of dysfunctional families – take Cain and Abel or Jacob and Joseph, not to mention David or Solomon neither of whom were model fathers. The good news is that the Bible is positive about families. The family was God's idea. The family is an integral part of being human. We are meant to relate to others. God has made us and shaped us to have relationships with each other and also with him.

This is why we are called to honour our parents. But, I want to take you back to our New Testament reading this morning where Paul told the Ephesians.....

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother, that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord"

So, children are to obey their parents – but, honour or respect is more important than mere obedience. It's certainly possible to obey without showing respect – you can still do as you're told and be completely rebellious at heart.

How then do we honour our parents?

The ways to do this are many and various but I want to suggest to you just four areas where we can truly honour our parents.....

1. Firstly, we should respect our parents. We tend to honour people we think deserve it or have earned it – we honour great sportsmen with awards, we honour successful politicians with a place in the House of Lords and we honour other dignitaries with plaques or statues in prominent places. But God says that we are to honour our parents not just because of what they have done, but because of who they are. This may be a hard pill for some of you to swallow, but God didn't say to honour your parents only if they're honourable. Nowhere does God say that respect has to be earned before you can give it. Rather, God calls us to honour our parents simply because they are our parents, because of the position they hold in our lives.

2 Another way we honour our parents is by letting them know you appreciate their efforts. There are some things that are just right and proper. One of those things is showing honour to the man and woman responsible for bringing you into this world, for feeding and clothing you, for sitting up with you when you were ill and just doing the million and one other things that go with being a parent. All that may have happened a long time ago but we should still honour our parents for all they did for us. There's the story of a boy who was talking to his friend at school. He said..."I'm really worried about my mum and dad. My dad works so hard so he can pay for everything we need. My mum does all the cooking and all the cleaning". So his friend said..."So what on earth are you worried about, it all sounds great to me?". The first boy replied..."I'm really worried they may try and escape!!". I have absolutely no doubt at all that what has helped me honour my parents efforts is becoming a parent myself. This is the hardest job I've ever had. It's difficult and it's costly, not just in financial terms but costly in time, in energy and emotions. If we can honour our parents in nothing else, we can honour them because they took on such a difficult job.

3. In 1 Timothy Ch 5, Paul is talking about the members of the church at Ephesus and says this...."these should learn first to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever". Notice that Paul uses the word "repay". To honour our parents involves, among other things, providing for them when they can no longer provide for themselves. I spoke earlier of the sacrifices made by our parents on our behalf. How can we begin to repay them? Part of the answer comes when they reach the point when they are no longer able to fend for themselves. This takes us back to the concept of family. Obviously, simply providing financial support for one's parents in their old age falls a long way short of honour if it isn't done with loving personal involvement. I suppose money can be an expression of love but it can never be a substitute. In these circumstances, parents need to feel that they are not an imposition. They need to feel that they have a place where somebody remembers them, cares about them and takes time to pay attention to them. When our parents need help, we honour them and God by meeting their needs.

4. Finally, I want to talk just a bit about forgiveness. All I have said so far pretty much reflects my own relationship with my parents. Sure, we had our moments but I have nothing to feel bitter about and I have nothing but gratitude for my parents. However, I'm deeply aware that not everyone is in that fortunate position. Some of you here this morning may feel real pain, possibly a deep anger or even both because you have been hurt by your parents. Possibly there were times in your life when it seemed that your parents didn't put your interests first – maybe they found it hard to show their love, possibly spent too much time at work and were rarely available for you. Perhaps it was as simple as feeling rejected by being sent away to boarding school. On the other hand, perhaps some grew up in homes with unspeakable abuse committed by the very people God charged with your safekeeping. I want you to understand that God is not saying here..."just get over it. Ignore the pain and deny that it ever happened." God isn't saying that at all – but, could it be possible that God is urging you to confront your parents and discuss what happened and learn to forgive them. If this feels really hard or even impossible, let me tell you that God has all the resources you need. Forgiveness is the beginning of healing. Even if your parents are no longer with you, forgive them in your heart, forgive them before God and allow him to begin the process that will change your life. Our God knows everything about unconditional forgiveness and what it can cost – that's what the cross at Calvary was all about.

We're coming to the end now and what I have been trying to say this morning is that this command to honour our father and mother is very special. How we treat our parents not only impacts on them, it also impacts on us. There is a blessing or a curse for us based on our treatment of our parents. To honour or to fail to honour our parents is a choice that takes us down one of two roads. That choice is ours.

Amen.

Graham Summers

No 4. About Keeping Sunday Special

Rev'd Nigel Stowe's sermon is not available but, what follows are the notes published to accompany his sermon.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS: THE MAKER'S INSTRUCTIONS GOD'S LAWS FOR LIFE AND LIBERTY

1. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.
3. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your *God*, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them. But he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.
5. Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.
10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

From Exodus 20: 1-17

Jesus said, * Whoever has my commands and keeps them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him". John 14: 21 N.I.V.

No. 4 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy"

Context. The first 4 commandments spell out our relationship to and duty towards God. We need to be in a right relationship with *God* in order to be right with others.

No.1. We are to have a single minded, whole hearted belief and trust in *God*, showing him our love and allegiance....

No.2. with no alternatives, and no "time out"¹¹.

No. 3. We are to have the deepest reverence and respect for *God's* Name, Character and Word.

No.4. We are to use our *God* given span for life and time according to His pattern and priorities, 24/7.

"Sabbath" = "Cessation", from our daily secular work.

This Commandment teaches us that:-

It is a "creation ordinance" reflecting *God's* creative work followed by His rest, renewal, satisfaction and enjoyment of His activity.

It covers all 7 days of the week, and the ratio and balance between work and rest, and rest and work. It provides the necessary structure, pattern, routine and rhythm of life.

It belongs to *God*. It is the Sabbath of and to the Lord, our *God*.

It is inclusive of our household, visitors and animals.

The Lord has attached his blessing upon it and its observance.

God has entrusted us with his Sabbath. It's our responsibility to keep it holy - set apart for our good and His glory.

Observing the Sabbath gives *God* the opportunity to re-mould us. "Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let *God* re-mould your minds from within" Rom. 12:2. J.B.Phillips

The Christian wishes to celebrate *God's Sabbath* on the first rather than the seventh day, reflecting Christ's resurrection. Each Sunday is a little Easter!

The fourth Commandment has an equal weight and authority as the others. It is much more than suggestions or guide lines.

Some challenges to our devotion. A commitment to the Lord:-

"HE is either LORD of all, or not lord at all".

"Tell me what you do on Sundays and I'll tell you the name of your god"

No 3. About Taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Readings: Exodus 3:13-15; Revelation 4:6b-end; John 17:6, 11-17

When Mike preached two weeks ago about Adultery, he said that the purpose of the commandments, what they were about, was HOLINESS. Holiness. I can't argue with that ... well, I wouldn't dare, anyway, would I???? but that begs the question, too, what is holiness? To be holy – is that the same as being "good"? Out with the dictionary – holy – 1. morally and spiritually excellent, or perfect; 2. belonging to, devoted to, God. So yes, it does involve being "good", but it also involves belonging to God, and the point is that the goodness flows from the belonging to God, not the other way round. So that's what the commandments aim to enable us to do – to live lives dedicated to God, good lives. Well, again, I can't argue with that – not that I achieve it!! But that is a different story, and one I want to say just a word about at the end.

One of the disadvantages of the fact that we have slightly played around with the order of the commandments, is that it makes it less easy to see that the first three are to do with our conduct in respect of God, and the others more to do with our conduct in respect of other people. And today, we're into the third commandment - Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain.

O K, so what's this all about really? What's the primary concern of this commandment? Mike also said in his sermon that adultery strikes at the very heart of the deepest and most precious relationship we can have, that between man and wife. And I think that something very similar is true with this commandment – if we take the name of the Lord in vain – we strike at the very heart of our relationship with God – we dishonour him by not giving to his name the honour that is due to him. But there's more to it than that, too. So much more.

Names are important, aren't they. When she was twenty, one of our twin daughters changed her name – she did it properly, by deed poll etc, so that from then on she was legally known as Hannah, not Veronica. I have to say it took us a while to get used to it ... I find it quite interesting to think back on the hurt I felt at the time ... her father and I had spent some time choosing the names for our children, and in changing it she had in some way repudiated our choice, almost our love, our parenting ...

Yes, our names matter – they are important. My name says something about me I went in to the garage recently and was very impressed that the service manager remembered my name – it made me feel valued. And this is true for all of us – to have someone remember your name shows that they remember you, that you have made an impression, that you matter to them. Which of course makes me feel very inadequate, because I am not good with remembering names – but if I forget yours, is doesn't mean that you are not valued, merely that I am old and forgetful!! The fault is all mine! Yes, naming is about relationship - it was by naming the animals at the creation that Adam expressed his dominion over them and over the creation.

And if my name matters to me, and says something about me, how much more is that true of God – and then I reflect upon the fact that in any television programme or film, *Oh my God* seems to be one of the commonest expressions – carrying so many different meanings, depending on the context in which it is used, and the tone of voice – awe, surprise, anger ... you name it!!!! (Excuse the pun!) And I'll come back to that, but first, a question comes to my mind ... we are being told "thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain". So what about the name of Jesus? The same applies, of course. Because Jesus is God the Son, the commandment applies to His name as well. Jesus himself told us that He will do whatever we ask in His name, which brings another whole aspect to this. His name is powerful, because His name is what He is ... to ask in His name means to know what His will is, and to ally ourselves with that will. The disciples did miracles and healings "in the name of Jesus". It was not in their own power that they did this, but in His. And Paul made it quite clear that no-one should use the name of Jesus to promote his own status, or importance – the same is true today - we should be careful not to use God's name to promote ourselves, or our own ideas. We will all remember those cult leaders who proclaimed that they were speaking in the name of God, and who have led their followers down false paths, often including mass suicide. Beware any politician who tells you that his party is the one doing God's will.

And to come back to what I was saying, thinking about what happens in a Court of Law can help to clarify things

When the witness steps into the box he is given a card bearing the words "I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I

shall give shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". From that moment on he is "under oath", and special importance attaches to what he says – if what he says is later proved to be false he is guilty of perjury. Of course it is possible to lie under oath, and people often do, but the underlying principle is that taking such an oath does provide some guarantee of truth.

This is about trust, actually, and integrity, trust based upon not using words and promises lightly. It's one of the things that people say about society today, that whereas once upon a time a man's word was enough, nowadays that is not nearly so much the case. And it is true to say, I think, that inasmuch as we find Joe Soap to be untrustworthy in small things, so we will not trust him in big ones. And I'm sure we can all relate to that – if I found my accountant cheating at cards, would I trust him with my business?

In our gospel reading this morning Jesus prays to the Father to protect His disciples in His name, and goes on Sanctify them in the truth – your word is truth. We, who believe in God and are disciples of Jesus, we are to be sanctified in the truth, which is God's word, and His name. If we so distort the truth that we say that black is white, for example, that is upsetting the whole basis of trust and is, in a sense, taking His name in vain. And as I have tried rather badly to explain, this means that our word is our truth as well – for Christians, who go by the name of Christ, anything that is false, or untrue, is indeed taking His name in vain.

We are reminded of this commandment every time we say the Lord's prayer – hallowed be thy name ... and this brings us to somewhere important, for it is the positive as opposed to the negative – thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain – hallowed be thy name. This is the standard – hallowed be thy name. And we cannot hallow his name by swearing, by lying, by cheating, by personal dishonesty. So that is our ideal, our vision – hallowed be thy name.

I want to close by coming back briefly to what I said at the beginning – the commandments are about holiness. And we all know that we fail. All the time. Paul himself acknowledged this – we can none of us keep all the commandments perfectly, all of the time. So we can none of us achieve that righteousness, that holiness that is God's will for us, and indeed our desire. But through faith in Christ we are loved, forgiven and accepted. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. We can rely upon Him for our salvation, for in Him is our hope and our salvation. Our part is to love and serve the Lord, and to go on, day by day, growing into the people He made us to be. Let us pray.

Almighty God, in Christ you make all things new; transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Rev'd Alison Caw

No 2 About Idols

Give us grace, O Lord, not only to hear your Word with our ears,
but also to receive it into our hearts and to show it forth in our lives,
for the glory of your great Name. Amen. The Ten Commandments

Willie a young woman of the Sibutu people of The Philippines stood at the side of the cess pit with the sharpened pointed blade of the knife was barely inches from her tummy, having got that far she still trembled at the enormity of what she was about, had she the courage to continue and complete the act?

Let me pause for a moment for this morning we continue our journey through the Ten Commandments, and come to the Second Commandment which is:- "You shall not make for yourself any idol, nor bow down to it or worship it." Some would have us believe that a string of ten negative rules have far out lived their usefulness. Today we prefer instead of 'the 'you shall not' to hear; 'you shall love - - '. However I for one believe there is a value in the negative. There are occasions, times and seasons when a sharp NO! Or an equally decisive DON'T are called for.

I well recall when I trained as a Messenger in the National Fire Service during the War that there were two important commands: the first was 'Rest' which meant one could complete the action that had been started. The other was 'Still' which meant an instant stopping, the continuation of which might imperil a life.

This permissive Society where anything goes has led to a downward spiral in the quality and decency of our communities. Failure to set and insist upon standards has, I believe, brought about many of the ills of our generation, as well as the ill thought out and thoughtlessly applied Health and Safety Regulations which have brought a stifling of initiative. Just tens days ago there was a news item telling how in five schools a clear list of rules and the enforcement of them had brought about not only well run schools but happier students.

So I am content to bring you this morning a reminder of this Commandment. You may well wonder what on earth I can say about it for I very much doubt if anyone here has an idol in their home. Unless of course you've been to foreign parts and returned with a memento in the form of a Buddha, or similar object, in which case I suggest when you get home you take it outside and destroy it.

We are all too educated, too civilized to have a man made object to which we defer. For we can appreciate the words of Psalm 115:4 "Idols are made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats".

Idol worship can be far more subtle than having a material object on which to focus. You have on your Service Sheet the definition of an idol which is: - "Anything or person that is the object of excessive or supreme devotion, or that usurps the place of God in human affections." We may not have excessive or supreme devotion to a person or object, but the phrase, 'anything that usurps the place of God' could be more likely where we can fall short. To get the full impact of that word 'usurp' it means 'to appropriate wrongfully to oneself a right or privilege.' So that any part of our life that rightfully belongs to, and is not wholly devoted to God is idolatry.

I doubt if many here are enamoured of 'Pop Idols', how about 'the home', being house proud or perhaps not so proud? You may have heard this before but it's worth repeating:-

"If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two If he came unexpectedly,
I wonder what you'd do.?"

Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room to such an honoured Guest,
And all the food you'd serve to Him would be the very best,
And you keep assuring Him you're glad to have Him there
That serving Him in your own home is joy beyond compare.

But when you saw Him coming, would you meet Him at the door
With arms outstretched in welcome to your heavenly Visitor?
Or would you have to change your clothes before you let Him in?
Or hide some magazines and put the Bible where they'd been?
Would you turn off the radio and hope He hadn't heard?
And wish you hadn't uttered that last, loud, hasty word?

Would you hide your worldly music
and put some hymn books out?
Could you let Jesus walk right in, or would you rush about?
And I wonder if the Saviour spent a day or two with you,
Would you go right on doing the things you always do?
Would you go right on saying the things you always say?
Would life for you continue as it does from day to day?
Would your family conversation keep up its usual pace?
And would you find it hard each meal to say a table grace?
Would you sing the songs you always sing,
and read the books you read,
And let him know the things on which your mind and spirit feed?
Would you take Jesus with you everywhere you'd planned to go?
Or would you, maybe, change your plans for just a day or so?

Would you be glad to have Him meet your very closest friends?
Or would you hope they'd stay away until His visit ends?
Would you be glad to have Him stay forever on and on?
Or would you sigh with great relief when He at last was gone?
It might be interesting to know the things that you would do?
If Jesus Christ in person came to spend some time with you.

What else apart from your homes might usurp the place of God in your affections? Finance, money, filthy lucre? We are in difficult times; we may have made wise provision for the future so that we many not be a burden on the family, but that now looks as though it might be insufficient. Do our money concerns usurp the place of God? Or perhaps Clothes, that crowded wardrobe, well I know, it's the weather, something for the winter and the summer and you want to look at least decent for Sunday? A new dress or the Charity box; yes I know men can be just as particular. Rather boils down to our own comfort doesn't it? We don't think about ourselves as idols, even though our waking thoughts fix on our own convenience, which might usurp the place of God.

Then there's that monster in the corner; the must watch programme on the same evening as the Prayer Meeting. These dark, cold, wet nights are not conducive to going out and after all Prayer Meetings are not your scene. On the other hand one might possibly accept an invitation out to a meal even if it was snowing! As much as you did not - --- you did not do it for Me.

Let me tell you more about Willie She was a Bible translation helper with Joe and Karen Allison, for the Sibutu language. She had been given a Bible and as she read Psalm 51 Willie spent days repenting of her past life. ¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; ² Wash away all my sin. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

These words profoundly touched her life. As Joe and Karen taught her about God's hatred of sorcery and charms she was faced with a huge challenge. Like all the local people she wore, hidden from sight around her middle a knotted string, it's an amulet with magical powers to protect them from evil. Now no one of her people had ever at anytime from the cradle to the grave been without this talisman. She wanted to please God but would she be assailed by all the dire results threatened by the Shaman if she removed this belt? All she had to do with one swift movement of her hand, was to slip that knife under that belt and let it fall into the pit. At last she acted and nothing happened, Nothing! Nothing! She was overwhelmed with such a feeling of peace and joy she thought she'd burst.

We are all in our own way very private individuals; no one else knows what goes on in our hearts and minds hidden from sight. Like Willie we have our tucked away bad habits of thought and action. Brothers and sisters, human it may be, but any object or person that usurps the place of God is idolatry. What in our lives couldn't we live without? Where is your treasure?

Let me tell you about two items in a National Newspaper that I read many years ago. The first simply stated 'that prolonged exposure to petroleum products could cause skin cancer.' The other, and this was in the bad old days, told how in China there were, on the lamp posts, loudspeakers that day by day played inspiring music and also told of the targets achieved in various factories, to inspire the workers to even greater efforts The authorities convinced of their value decided that it ought to be possible to reach even higher targets if they were to continue the use of the loudspeakers through the night. Prolonged exposure in this case did not have the desired effect.

You may well be asking. So what's all this got to do with me? I don't have an inordinate affection for my home, my television, my car, my clothes or my appearance. I might have concerns about my finance but money is no way my god. So this is another of those Ten Commandments that have little to do with me or the way I live my life. I don't steal or kill, to name just a couple. You are banging on about 'usurping' but nothing you've said so far impinges on my life. No I'm not smug but try and live a decent life and am not aware that I'm such a dreadful sinner.

But listen, whilst I continue to maintain the power of 'you shall not' I would nevertheless urge on you a better route to holiness, and by the way 'holiness' is a requirement for all followers of Christ, for He commands; 'be holy for I am holy.' Let's then turn our thoughts away from 'You shall not', to 'You shall'. The best way is to focus on Jesus; prolonged exposure to Him and His word will have beneficial effects. Some of you may well recall as a child or young person singing the chorus; "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim. In the light of His glory and grace."

Why settle for less than the best - come on lady, feel the quality, sell all you have and buy the pearl of great price. Jesus the altogether lovely. I can't anywhere near reach the heights of Pastor Lockridge's presentation, who said:

"Jesus supplies STRENGTH for the weak.
He's AVAILABLE for the tempted and the tried.
He SYMPATHIZES and He SAVES.

He STRENGTHENS and SUSTAINS.
He GUARDS and GUIDES.
He HEALS the sick.
He FORGIVES sinners.
He DELIVERS the captives.
He DEFENDS the feeble.
He BLESSES the young.
He SERVES the unfortunate.
He REGARDS the aged.
He REWARDS THE DILIGENT...
and He BEAUTIFIES the meek.
All this and so much more.
This is Jesus, my Jesus, and yours?

Paul writes, "I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ." Let me put it like this: Jesus my Saviour is the great Creator God, but also He is my brother, my friend, my ever present help and guide.

Now stop right there. When you invited Jesus into your life what did you think you were doing? Creating a holiday home for Him, or a week end retreat? No, you asked Him to be Lord of your life and He responded 'I will never, no never, leave you or forsake you.' He is your ever present help.

That poem "If Jesus came to your house," was interesting, thought provoking but it was wrong, sadly skewed, it did not ring true. "Do you not know you are the Temple of the Living God? It's not a question of 'If Jesus came to my House', for He is your constant Companion and friend. He stands beside you, even when you turn your back on Him to sin. He is there always, watching, waiting for your word of contrition; waiting to forgive. He is ever present saying 'I love you.' What need have we of all these other things that usurp, that wrongfully appropriate to our selves the devotion that wholly belongs to our Saviour and Lord?

An idol is:- "Anything or person that is the object of excessive or supreme devotion, or that usurps the place of God in our affections."

Perhaps in today's culture the word 'idol' does not equate with our outlook on life. Try using 'priority' instead. In the scale of priorities for our daily living where does Jesus come? There's the early morning dash to get up and get on with all the things, so many of them, that must be done and the morning slips by, where has Jesus been? Waiting for you to say 'Good morning. Prioritise.

I hear Jesus say "The first and greatest commandment is this 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, and with all your mind' ^{-Lk10:27} Perhaps 'you shall.' Is tougher than 'you shall not'?

In these early days of Lent let's turn away from anything or person that usurps the place of God in our lives. 'We lose what on our selves we spend' whether time, money or effort; 'we have as treasure without end, whatever Lord to Thee we lend, who givest all'.

God grant us a renewed devotion, a clearer focused view of Christ and His priorities in our daily living and to Him be all the glory. AMEN.

The Rev'd David Gosling,

No 1. You shall have no other Gods.

Deuteronomy 30.1-20 Colossians 1.15-20 John 14.1-14

So we come to the end of our series on 10 Commands. I hope you have appreciated the series. For me, being involved in preaching – have learned loads.

So today – No other Gods but me.

So we look at the thing that has been behind all the commands – you do not lie because is truth – you do not murder because we are in God’s image – you do not commit adultery because God is faithful – you do not worship idols because although they may seem attractive, God is the real thing. And on. It would be lovely to talk about the nature of God this morning and there is a lot -- Aseity – beauty – blessedness – communicable attributes – incommunicable attributes – compassion – eternity – faithfulness – freedom – glory – goodness – grace – happiness – holiness – immutability – impassibility – independence – infinity – invisibility – jealousy – justice – knowledge – love – mercy – omnipotence – omnipresence – omniscience – order – patience – peace – perfection – power – righteousness – self-existence – simplicity – sovereignty – spirituality – timelessness – truthfulness – unchangeability – unity – will – wisdom – wrath.

You are going to get away lightly this morning because those are only the beginning and we are not going to look at any of those.

2 types of people here – those for whom this command ‘you shall have no other gods beside me’ is not a problem and for those for whom it is a problem. Hope to explain for those who think it is a problem that it is not. For those who think it is not that it is!

So for those who think it is a problem – what do I mean.

Context of 10 Commands – Israel just crossed Red Sea from Egypt. About to set off into Promised Land – going to be there with many other religions – Lord warning that they were not to get involved with other religions – and they did – other religions attracted them like moths to a light. They tried to get away with thing called syncretism. That is where worship Yahweh and other Gods. ‘Hedging your bets’. Lord says that is not on. Why? Because there is one Lord – he is The Lord the God Almighty – he is a trinity comprising God the Father, the son, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Now this relates to us today – this is where we have the problem. What about other religions – very tempting – very nice – it is warm and cuddly open and accepting to say that all religions are separate paths leading to the same God. Very new age - Well that is where the Israelites were and the 1st of 10 Commands says no – that may well be nice but it is not true.

You have to dispose of the 1st of the 10 commands to follow that route – it is uncomfortable but it is true. And it is not that there were not other religions around at the time so it was not an issue. It was precisely an issue and the Lord knew exactly what he was asking when he put it at no1. – and he has not changed his mind on this.

Just to make the point here -following this to conclusion. There is a great deal that is very similar in most of the major world religions – esp between Islam and Christianity. But, when you get to Jesus we say he was the very son of God, God is a trinity. Islam says no he was not and God is not a trinity. End of story. And we are not talking about some complex peripheral doctrinal issue of little importance. This is absolutely fundamental. Christianity says God came and walked on this earth and died for our sin on a cross. That is important – Islam say not he did not in every respect. And I do not know how you get around that. So you get back to 1st of 10 commands. No other Gods but me. Period! And I have not quoted C S Lewis for a few weeks so the problem of Jesus is that he was either good, mad, or bad. He did not give us any alternatives and he did not intend to.

So those who think that this command creates a problem because of other religions being equally valid – no it does not create a problem. It is simple. They are out. Sorry.

Now to those who are comfortable with this command – lets explain why you do have a problem.

The issue is what God’s do you have.

Your Gods will be the things you spend your money on – your time – your energies – your thought life – emotions.

Where does that lead us? Money may be your God. Time spent worrying about current recession and the value of your investments – your stocks and shares and you are consumed by that.

If your career is your God – your family, health, marriage, your scruples will all be subjugated to your job and your need to get on – it will consume you – or will have consumed you in the past.

Same applies to hobbies and interests –

I come across folk who are good folk – Christian folk - but genuinely find it hard to get the hour a week to get to church – struggle to spend some time each day reading bible and praying – hard to get to home group

But magically they are able to keep up with so many other things – they lead a very full and active life.

Not for me or us to judge but point is you do the things that are important to you – how it works.

Like you are a sphere – many interests in that sphere – God is one of those interests but you are at the centre – God say not really on – need to be at the centre – on the throne – remember we are talking about the almighty God of creation – spoke a word and the whole of our universe explodes into being – you are part of that.

Need to say something here also about interests, groups and hobbies in context of having no other God because God is jealous. And jealous here is not in the sense that we generally use it in a negative way – here God is jealous because he knows that for us to do otherwise harms us – not because he is short of friends or something.

Many things in our society have a spiritual content or basis. So you read horoscope for a bit of fun – 23rd Psalm says “he leads me beside still waters ... he guides my paths in righteousness” what is this about being guided by the stars.

Rightly he is jealous. He sees and he sees your heart being drawn into that stuff – that is how it works

We get drawn into superstitions and all that sort of stuff – I believe that my God is more powerful than broken paving stones, Friday 13th, black cats, lay lines, ladders, breaking a mirror, throwing salt over your shoulder and all the rest.

Gives me joy to step on broken paving stones or walk underneath ladders – my God is real – and he is jealous over these things. As you respond to these superstitions they draw your heart away from the power of God to protect and keep you – that is why he is jealous – negative faith.

Yoga for instance – very good exercise – but yoga is a spiritual thing – as you get into it you mediate the light and going down into yourself not on God. That is spiritual.

Many things like that. So you must be very wary of interests hobbies, groups, societies that are good and fine – but as you go into them have a spiritual element because you will bump into the 1st Command and one jealous God and you do not want to do that. And because what comes out of that society or group is good does not mean that God thinks it is OK. There is a great deal of good in other religions – but we have already dealt with that a moment ago. Whether they do good is not the issue – it is who or what they and in due course you are led to worship. And if it is anything other than God the Father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit – then it is something else.

That is a big issue.

I trust you believe in the devil. He is on second page and the penultimate page. All over the Bible and Jesus did. If you have an enemy, 2 common tactics he can deploy – one is to tell you that he does not really exist and the other that he is not really the enemy at all – in fact he is your friend. Governments and armies still use those tactics today.

So if the devil can draw you into worshipping something seemingly good he will be very happy – so long as it is something other than the living triune God whose son is Jesus Christ.

Just one of the ways you can spot these things – the Lord leads us into freedom and peace - these other things lead to fear oppression – reading your horoscope will not set you free – you will find it does quite the opposite.

So, you may need to give something up. You will see it by the fruit it is bringing into your life. May need to start stepping on broken paving stones and rejoicing.

The operative word in Jesus’ summary of the law is the word ‘all’.. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength.. Because if there are other things distracting you, then it is not ‘all’.

If the Lord has touched your heart or mind about something and I hope he has. Stop now – say sorry – repent – seek his help. You may find this thing has a surprising hold over you – but that is a mark of how much you need to let go of it.

Moment of quiet – let God speak.

Rev’d Mike Bisset