

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS - "WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?"

Since we have no catechumens preparing for baptism this year, we get to hear the famous Old Testament passage from Exodus this weekend where "God delivered all these commandments." We're so familiar with them, most of us might not realize how narrowly they were understood in Moses' day, and why the question presented to Jesus in Luke's Gospel that resulted in the parable of the Good Samaritan even needed to be asked: "who is my neighbor?" (We'll have to wait until the next liturgical year to hear that wonderful teaching again.)

Even though the Old Testament prophets constantly attempted to interpret the Ten Commandments in the way God intended them to be understood—and which Jesus affirmed in that great parable—they were applied far too often in a frighteningly narrow way throughout Israel's history. The commandments that apply to our relationships with one another seem so clear-cut to us: don't kill, don't steal, don't lie or commit adultery, don't covet what belongs to your neighbor....Ah, that's the problem: "who is my neighbor?" That "neighbor" was frequently understood in a very literal way, namely, a fellow Israelite. It was perfectly OK to kill a foreigner or steal from them, or commit adultery with foreign women (King Solomon had a huge harem!). There was no problem with lying to an Egyptian or coveting the land, the possessions or the wives of an Assyrian. They're not my neighbors!

Again, the Old Testament prophets railed against the sins committed and the injustices perpetrated in the name of this narrow reading of the commandments, but their words often fell on deaf ears. Even the Book of Leviticus attempted to define rights for "the alien in your midst", but those rights were routinely ignored. And Jesus' praise of Samaritans and his acceptance of Gentiles and sinners helped send him to his death on the cross. Such a narrow understanding of "neighbor" persists even in our own day with the demonizing of immigrants, the misinterpretation of the Quran by ISIS, and the hardening of political ideologies throughout the world. But "who is my neighbor?" has only one answer: everyone. The lawyer in Luke's Gospel who first asked the question was most likely unhappy with that answer.

The Ten Commandments remain a basic, bottom-line guide to living a holy, moral, loving, just and righteous life—as long as we understand them properly. But Jesus made it even easier for us by summing them up with a quote from the Book of Deuteronomy—with a slight addition of his own—which we know as the Two Great Commandments: *You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.* We know who God is; we just have to remember who our neighbor is.

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