

## Lent 3 John 2:13-22

Our readings today remind us of the basis for the Jewish law, and by extension the law Jesus was clear he came to fulfil not abolish, the 10 commandments. We know they exist, some of us can recite them, but how much do we really consider them? Lent is a great time for such reflections so here is a little review of the 10 commandments.

The Commandments fall into two groups. We begin in the first four with God. Just like the Bible itself. 'In the beginning, God'. Therefore, we begin with God, reminding us of just his primacy.

You shall have no other gods before me. God is our Creator, and on that basis alone God has the right of first place. Every breath we draw, we draw only because God has gifted it to us, our tenure of life is very insecure. Yet we presume to be our own god, our own rule-maker, arbiter and judge.

Human society thinks it can get along very well without God, and for many the word 'God' is merely an expletive- and this of course is just to break another commandment. Let us understand that human society everywhere is in rebellion against God. Many will express belief in 'a god'; many will turn to God in prayer in times of crisis and emergency. But if we suggest that God should in any way proscribe what we do and have a say in the conduct of our lives- well that's something very different! People avoid that sort of commitment.

The fourth of the God-ward commands forges a bridge between our responsibility toward God and toward the society in which we live. His primary interest may be in each individual and toward forming a personal relationship, but God is concerned with our society and that society should honour him by keeping the Sabbath Day holy. Now, of course, the 'Sabbath' is not the Jewish Sabbath. But the principle of setting one day aside to be special still stands. It is the day which should be 'holy'. It is to remember God's special place as Creator. The Christian should keep one day aside to remember the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is the 'religious' case for 'keeping Sunday special' There are other potent factors: there is the clear human need for a day of rest; a day for the family to focus on life's true meaning.

Then come the six commandments regulating our outward conduct.

There are the four 'thou shalt not's' with which so many people associate the commandments as though God were some kind of cosmic spoilsport! But in fact, the first of the person-ward commandments is a positive one to 'honour your father and mother'. More and more people are tending to load all the blame on their parents for all their failures, shortcomings and sufferings. Our parents, our elders, those who love us, often cop the most flack when we are under pressure, but they are the ones we can always turn to because they love us, God's interest in preserving that loving relationship is clear here. The last command, You shall not covet we will be coming back to.

Before that let's recall the absolute and all-embracing nature of the Commandments. God expects, as is his right, absolute obedience. Remember that Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, put a much sharper edge on the commandments: to be angry without cause was to be guilty of murder: to lust after a person other than our spouse was to commit adultery. The Bible also tells us that when we break one commandment we

are guilty of breaking the law. The Commandments then show us two things -the fact of our sin and -our need of a Saviour.

And this is where we come back to that tenth commandment: you shall not covet. This goes deeper than our outward actions. It probes the very depth of our hearts and desires. The apostle Paul says in Romans 7:

I would not have known what sin was, except through the law. For I wouldn't really have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "You shall not covet". But sin, seizing an opportunity provided by the commandment produced in me every kind of covetous desire.

Ignorance of the criminal law is no excuse; nor is ignorance of God's law. God's standards do not vary, and every human being is guilty at that bar. Indeed, what all the commandments do, and especially the first and last is to underline the fact that we fail and fall short.

So, we need a Saviour if we are to live fully in relationship with God. The Christian Gospel is that in Jesus Christ and his death at Calvary; in his blood shed there is that provision, by grace we are invited in despite our failings and shortcomings. Jesus condemned sin, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fulfilled, not in order to gain favour from God, but as a response to the love we already received. We may not understand how or why. God does not desire that we do, rather that we believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's law still stands. But in Christ the law no longer condemns us. Through his Old Testament prophet God promised that he would write his law on our hearts. As we trust Jesus as Saviour that is what happens. No longer do we have to obey the law to justify ourselves; to be 'on the right side' with God. Yes: his law still stands; he is no less holy. But his law is now within us. Not as a weight to condemn us, but as a guiding principle, our response to his grace. He simply reminds us;

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other. If we can live by this, then surely we will not go far astray.