

Sunday's Sermon

GLORIA DEI LUTHERAN CHURCH

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

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Appropriate Behavior

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

May the grace and peace of God the Father and the Lord Jesus the Christ live in you. Amen.

This past Saturday, 13 persons from six of our Peninsula churches gathered together to hear and learn from the past president of the International Bonhoeffer society. He spoke about our responsibility as followers of Christ; to not only talk about, but to live out our call to love God and to love our neighbor; according to Bonhoeffer.

In other words, in a world that is in disarray, how are we to live out appropriate and responsible Christian behavior in the world. How do we live a life that is sincere and honest?

Bonhoeffer's guiding tenant, those beliefs that were extremely important him, were the teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

I would like to back up a little bit and propose that our principles of acting within the spiritual and moral boundaries God expects of us; our principles of acting within the theological and ethical boundaries God expects of us, are found within the Ten Words, the Decalogue, which we know as the Ten Commandments.

I invite you today to look at the Ten Commandments as a God-spoken guide for us to gauge whether we are living authentically in this world.

These Words are not just hints, or suggestions, but Words whose purpose is to define and shape our lives together; Words that help us mirror the distinctive attributes and actions of our God to those who are in any kind of need for help or kindness, and Words that have serious consequences if not intentionally followed.

And no matter how you number them up, within these directives is the essence of our responsibility to God and our responsibility to others, in this covenant relationship.

Because God has liberated us from sin, this is the behavior He expects from us.

Most of us may look at the Ten Commandments as Moses presented them to the children of Israel, as a “to-do-not list,” as the King James Version would say, a “thou shalt not” list. But let’s approach the Ten Commandments from a different perspective, a “thou shalt list,” or as Martin Luther would say a “we are to-do list.”

Our foundation is our reverence, love and trust of God and from that will flow our respect, love and trust for each other. We begin by accepting the fact that we are all created by God and therefore are God’s beloved creation. When God made humanity, He didn’t say the work of His hands was so-so, He said the work of His hands was “very good.”

One theologian has said, “It is important to ‘get it right’ about our God, in order to ‘get it right’ about our neighbor.”

We live in a time when the populace is encouraged, even given permission to berate, demean, criticize and call into question those who are in any kind of need for help or kindness.

So, for us, as Christians, living in the midst of this climate of a lack of consideration for others, and an emphasis on one’s own personal profit or well-being; for us, as Christians’, the question remains, how are we to live out appropriate and responsible Christian behavior.

According to Martin Luther’s interpretation of the Ten Commandments, “we are to help and support our neighbor in any need, to speak well of them and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”

But in dealing with others, sometimes we conclude that there is no light bright enough to show *some* people in even a good light. But still we are held accountable to this covenant of grace and mercy that binds us to the One who is Grace and Mercy.

We have a God who “delivers” by “freeing slaves” from all kinds of “masters.” Therefore, He expects us to “come through,” He expects us to “bring it.” God says, “Show me what you got. Let me see you live out my call in your life.”

So, what is God looking for?

According to the Ten Commandments, God is looking for two types of behavior, faithfulness and fair-mindedness.

Faithfulness in our relationship with Him and fair-mindedness in our relationship with others.

Our faithfulness to God is shown when we:

- Reverence, love and trust God above all things. God desires and deserves first place in our lives.

Our faithfulness to God is shown when we:

- Use God's name in times of prayer, praise and thanksgiving because our words reveal the intentions of our hearts.

Our faithfulness to God is shown when we:

- Participate in the hearing and in the learning of God's Word. God gives us a day to re-charge our batteries and to remember Him.

Our fair-mindedness toward our neighbor is shown:

- When our actions are impartial and honest;
- When our actions are not guided by bigotry or prejudice, or hatred
- When we consider the lives and property of others as having value, as having worth.

Our fair-mindedness toward our neighbor is shown:

- When we say no to violence and yes to life.
- When we keep our promises.
- When we are givers, not takers.
- When we tell the truth.
- When we are content with what we have.

In a nutshell, the essence of the Ten Commandments reminds me of the words found in Micah 6:8, the Message version:

⁸ But He's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women.

***It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,
be compassionate and loyal in your love,***

***And don't take yourself too seriously—
take God seriously.***

Because God has liberated us from sin, this is the behavior He expects from us.

Sometimes in the center of crazy comes common sense.

We often ask kids who might want to misbehave how they would act if their parents were present. Their answer usually changes their behavior.

So how would we behave if we knew God were present. Well, He is and for some unfortunately, it doesn't matter. For correct actions stem from right relationships with those we are accountable to and ultimately hold us accountable.

That is what the Ten Commandments is for us, common sense behavior.

We are God's people and should not have to be reminded of what is expected of us, but we do. We forget that our faith is not a private matter. Our faith becomes public through our actions.

So, God gave us what we needed; a list to remind us that His hunger for us to use the Ten Commandments as an opportunity to grow deeper in our relationship with Him through His son.

For it is His Holy Spirit that will nudge and encourage us to "get it right' about our God, in order to 'get it right' about our neighbor."

Amen.