

Exodus 20 ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder. ^[c]

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Matthew 21:33-39

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

³³ “Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.

³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. ³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ ³⁸ But when the

The Exodus reading is as we all know the 10 Commandments. I have heard them described in many different ways:

One of the most important scriptures.

The first human rights declaration.

Essential rules for life.

Those are the common viewpoints from people who have a positive attitude towards religion in general and the Bible in particular.

However, I have also heard people with a negative attitude attack them as:

A set of kill joy "thou shalt not's".

An attack on my freedom.

Religious control mechanism.

Do you see that unity and dis-unity in the opposing reactions to these monumental God given commands?

When I study these foundational commandments of our heritage I do see how they are an attempt at a religious control mechanism. They are a plea, an instruction to control those aspects of human nature which destroy:

Disrespect.

Putting me at the center of the universe.

Thinking I can have everything my way and to my advantage.

With no regard what-so-ever of the cost to others or the earth.

Letting violence, lust and greed have free rein.

They are specifically crafted to bring the oh so human and oh so common causes of dis-unity into a state of unity.

Then when we turn to today's parable from the lips of Jesus. What do we find?

A tale of about a landowner who sets out a fertile, well provisioned and profitable vineyard. He rents it out to some tenants and when the time comes for payment. The tenants go on a spree of violence and destruction.

Twice they attack his servants. Maiming and killing and then when the landowner's son comes :

“they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’”

Looking back, as we do, knowing about the Passion and the Cross this is taken as a fore telling of the fate and treatment of Jesus, Son of God.

But when Jesus first told this story the listeners knew nothing about that. They would have taken it at face value as story, probably all too familiar to them, of a landlord who invested a lot of time, talent and treasure into a vineyard. A landlord who expected a return on his investment.

A landlord who trusted his tenants.

A landlord who tries time and time again to give those tenants a second and a third chance.

A landlord who only gets :

Disrespect.

Selfishness.

Greed,

Violence.

Dis-unity writ large in word and action.

Two scriptures. One about controlling the worst aspects of our behavior and one spelling out the consequences of not controlling them.

All of this is not ancient history. It is rather about our time and every time in Christian history.

It is about tackling dis-unity with the unity of the Good News.

Power, entitlement, anxiety and division are rampant in our world.

All symptoms and causes of dis-unity.

We are the modern tenants of the vineyard and the landlord is still expecting a good harvest. Still expecting good produce which overflows the vineyard walls and spreads out across the land.

The unity powered by God's word and with God's help is to teach the world about:

- The Good news of hospitality that refuses the fearful exclusions that seduce us into seeing those unlike us as a threat.
- The Good News of generosity that refuses the greed which enriches a few and depletes the many.
- The Good News of forgiveness in a world that endlessly keeps score and makes those declared as losers pay and pay and pay.
- The Good News of justice for the vulnerable in a society that is increasingly hostile towards them.

So, the challenge and the command of God for us today is to be a people so fully settled in God's goodness, so fully certain of Christ's example, so fully aware of the presence of the Spirit that we can help bridge the chasms and heal the wounds and bring dis-unity back to unity in Christ .Amen.

