

## (3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost)

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June 10, 2018

Exodus 19:1-6; 20:1-17 & Deuteronomy 5:1-22

### The Decalogue

Earlier this week, I made a post on Facebook asking people to share stories of “things” that were special to them that they somehow managed to break.

Lots of people shared their stories of: a grandmother’s “Hummel,” a grandfather’s favorite candy dish, a potted bowl purchased as an anniversary gift, a special Christmas tree ornament purchased when a first child was born and money was extremely tight, a cookie jar that a person had just received as a gift, a light fixture a future daughter-in-law broke on her first visit to your future in-laws home, and a cello.

What about you? Do you have a story of something that was very special to you that somehow by accident you managed to break?

There are plenty of things I have broken over my lifetime - plates, cups, my eyeglasses, a chair when I sat on it, the screen on my iPhone when I dropped it. My brother, Stewart, and I, while wrestling in the living room, broke a special lamp that was a gift to my parents from a church my dad had previously served.

But perhaps the one thing I broke, and broke is not the right word, smashed is a better word, was a glass angel figurine that Staci had been as a gift. I am embarrassed to tell you, that, yes, I was angry, over what I don’t remember, and threw it on the floor.

We humans do have a tendency to break things, sometimes in fits of anger.

Moses was no different. He has just received the sacred stone tablets upon which God had hand written, front and backside, all the commandments and codes as a gift to the people.

As Moses comes down the mountain, he hears the people engaged in loud partying. The writer of Exodus tells us: **“As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain.”** Exodus 32:19-20

Let’s be honest, like Moses and the Hebrew people, we have all broken the commandments - many times over. Our passionate emotions, including anger, can get the better of us, and smash, another commandment bites the dust!

We could talk about each of the Ten Commandments, but this morning, let's talk about the first grouping, the "vertical" ones that deal with our relationship with God. In order to understand the importance of all of the commandments and codes, we must first understand the central importance of this set.

They are in this order:

1 - "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me."

2 - "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. You shall not bow down to them or worship them."

3 - "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God."

4 - "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy."

You can sum them up, as Jesus did, with these words of the Greatest Commandment: **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."**

As I said, we all have broken, even smashed these at times by our words we speak, our worldview and our treatment of other people.

While we all might argue that we do not have any other gods we worship or idols we bow down to in our lives, save the One True Living God of us all, if we are honest and do not lie to ourselves, we all have them in our lives, and we do worship them.

Think about these "gods" which we offer our passionate devotion to and worship of: our favorite sports team, like the Packers. Our country - "America First!" A flag which we must stand and pledge or sing of our loyalty to. An amendment and our guns. Money, and making more of it in our lives. Our work and careers. Idolizing of celebrities on screen and stage.

But what about things in our sanctuaries? What about stone monuments of the Commandments placed in public places?

Can any or all of these things become for us our own "Golden Calf" that we idolize and offer our allegiance to in place of God?

If we are all honest, we all at times place our devotion and loyalty to other "gods" we have created in society and church.

In saying: **“You shall have no other gods before me nor make any idols to worship,”** God also says: **“I am a jealous God”**.

In her book, *Amazing Grace: A Vocabulary of Faith*, Kathleen Norris says: **“Jealousy... is a loaded word...Human jealousy is a sign of fear. Often, it indicates immaturity, or a maladaptation of the ability to love.”**

Norris adds: **“God’s jealousy is a different matter, more like mother-love, the protective zeal of a lioness or mother bear for her young. The word ‘jealousy’ has its root in ‘zealous,’ denoting extreme enthusiasm and devotion, and God’s jealousy retains the word’s more positive aspects. It helps us to trust. Who, after all, would trust a God, a parent, spouse, or lover, who said to us ‘I really love you, but I don’t care at all what you do or who you become?’”**

God does care about us and how we live in relationship with God and with each other.

**“God,”** Kathleen Norris further notes, **“does not exist as a convenience, magically giving us what we want, or feel we deserve, but a God who simply IS - the sound of being, the great ‘I Am’.**

God is the One and Only One in whom we live, and move and have our being.

God is the One and only One who loves us.

God is the One and only One who offers us a relationship that gives us life.

God is the One and only One who we can trust even when life overwhelms us, and we feel lost, and the darkness swallows us up, and death is all around us.

God is the One and only One who we can trust to lead us into right relationship with one another and guide us home.

No political leader or national government can do that, nor can a weapon or military machine. A flag can’t do it. Neither can a sports team. Climbing a career ladder or working long hours? Nope. No amount of money will offer you this. Neither can a sports team.

We all break the commandments, including the ones that call us into relationship with God.

We do, yes, but God does not. Time and time again, we break them, failing to love God with all our heart, soul and strength, and in that way, failing to love others too. But still, God forgives, healing our brokenness with love and grace, and calling back into relationship with each other and with God.

God will replace the first set of stone tablets with new ones. God will eventually upgrade those by writing a new covenant on the hearts of the people. And in time, offer us a better set, one that embodies all the commandments into One - that being Jesus of Nazareth - the human incarnation of God's love.

And that is worth all our devotion, and loyalty, and allegiance above any and all things our human wants and desires can fashion.