

*Third Sunday in Lent*

March 4, 2018

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John. (John 2:13-22)

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What if? What if God came to you and said, "Jody, Gordy, Sue, Valerie, Steve" – put your own name in there – "create the life I intend for this creation. You make this world good." Where would you start? And, no, you can't run in the other direction. You can't make excuses. And you can't say, "I'm too busy right now." God is nothing if not persistent. God is not letting you off the hook on this one.

"Bring my reign to the earth." "Create the life I intend for this creation." "Make this world good." Where would you start? It's a big job. It's a crazy assignment. It might be impossible. But where would you start?

Imagine for a moment you are Noah and his wife coming off the ark, like we heard about two weeks ago, coming along with all the animals into green, unspoiled land, wide open with possibility. All you have is the promise of God's grace, that "*I will never again destroy the world. I will always love you.*" Where would you start to build this new world? What would you do?

Or imagine you are Abram and Sarai, leaving his father's house that we heard about last week. Going into a wide, wild, open country with endless possibility. You could be anything, you could do anything, you can have anything. All you know is the promise from God that God will be faithful. God will work through your descendants forever. What would you do?

Imagine you are Moses or Miriam in the midst of a nation of former slaves. That's what we heard about in the First Reading today. The sun is coming up over the mountains on a place where there are no taskmasters, no making bricks from straw, no working to exhaustion every day, with never enough time, or never enough resources, or never enough energy. The future is open before you. All you know is that God has chosen you. What would you do? Where would you start?

In each case, these people of God are called to create, to build the world that God intends, beginning only with promises of grace and fidelity. What would you do? "I want you to build my world." How would you start?

You need a plan. If you're going to build something, you need a plan.

The summer before last, my husband and I got involved in a kitchen remodel. Have you ever lived through a kitchen remodel? For us, it started with these ten-year old white painted cabinets that really needed a refresh. But then we thought, it would be really nice if we could move the oven over there, and it would be really nice if we could make it big enough that we could cook with friends. And what if we got rid of that desk that we never used. We started a plan. It took all summer to get the plan together and get the drawings. And then we started. For three months, we ate carry out, or cooked on hot plates. For three months, we could not find a single thing, while the electrician and the cabinetmakers followed the plan. At one point they didn't follow the plan. They had put the oven in the wall like eight inches above where it should be. And I opened up the oven and thought, "I'm going to have to stand on a stool to put things in this oven. And when I pull hot things out, I am going to pour them on my head." It was not good. So we made them go back and follow the plan.

If you're to build something, you need a plan. If you're going to build the world that God intends, you're going to need a plan.

And that's what these commandments are that we heard this morning. The Ten Commandments are a plan, a blueprint, for building a world based on the same loving relationship that God has with us. A plan for God's world, a beautiful, hopeful, doable plan.

But before I talk about this plan, I want to talk about what the commandments are not. The Ten Commandments are not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. They are a plan, a blueprint, a tool, for creating a world based on loving relationships. They are not the relationship. We still have to build those.

You wouldn't hang the blueprints to your house on the wall and say, "Isn't that beautiful? Won't that create a beautiful house?" You don't reverence the blueprint, just like you don't reverence the commandments. Reverence the world that they will build. Reverence the relationship they will build. Reverence the God who helps us create them. Commandments are a means to an end, not the end itself. And commandments are not weapons that we can hurl at each other, saying, "You're not good enough," or "I'm better than you are because I follow the commandments." Or, "If you break these, you are so going to get it." God does not say this when God gives the commandments. God says only, *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."* This is the God who has already promised grace to Noah, who has already promised fidelity to Abram, and who has said, *"I will make this covenant with generations to come."*

This is the God who has already brought these slaves out of Egypt, opened the Red Sea, provided manna from the sky, and water from a rock. *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out."* The commandments are not weapons. They are gifts of a loving God. They are a plan to live that love.

So, the commandments are not the finished product and they are not a weapon. So what are they? What is this plan that will help us create a world; the plan that will help us live in and through the love of God? This is a plan in three parts. Just like my kitchen had electrical and plumbing and carpentry, this, too, has three parts that all work together.

I am going to invite you to pull out that yellow insert - yellow, goldenrod, whatever. And I do this because, well, not many of us can remember these commandments by number. And, by the way, different denominations number them differently. So even if you do remember the number, you might remember the number that other denominations use.

This is a plan in three parts. The first part is a relationship with God. It is summed up by Jesus as, *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."* In particular, this part, which is the first two commandments, in particular, it says, "God is God and you are not." That's number one. And neither are the other things that you would like to make with your life. And, two, have some respect. Don't think you can control God, or manage God, or keep God in your pocket until you need God and then pull that out. That's no way to build a relationship. This first part speaks to building a relationship with God. God is God, and you're not. Have some respect.

The last part, which is commandments four through ten, is about our relationship with each other. More commandments, a little more structure we need for that part, to build a world where you can live with your neighbor, and your neighbor can be unafraid that you will hurt them. Your neighbor can be unafraid that you will take what God has given them. Your neighbor can be unafraid that you will attack their honor. Jesus says, *"Love your neighbor as yourself."* This part of the plan helps to build that.

So we have the first part, which builds relationship between you and God; the last part that builds relationship between you and your neighbor. And then there is the middle part that holds them together. "*Remember the Sabbath day.*"

Stop once a week and take stock. Once a week, remember the first part of that plan that you're not God. You depend on God for everything. So rest, play. Do nothing to earn the air you breathe. Remember that life is gift.

And on the Sabbath, remember the last part of the plan. About being connected to others. Give thanks for everyone who touched everything you ate. And everyone who touched every piece of clothing that you wear, that made them and sold them. And then go have fun. Go out and invite people to hang at your house. Enjoy each other's company. Rejoice in the connections, lots of connections.

The Sabbath day is the day to remember the plan. To live deeply into the plan, so that for the next six days you might remember the plan, when other things bear upon you. A plan in three parts: a relationship with God, a relationship with others, and a day to remember them both.

So, back to my original question. If God said to you, "Bring my reign to earth, create the life I intend for this creation, make this world good," where would you start?

You know, I'm going to ask that in a different way. Since God has said to us, "Bring my reign to earth," "create the life I intended for this creation," "make this world good," how shall we start? Perhaps we should start with a plan.

Amen.

