

Exodus 20:1-17

Third Sunday in Lent

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. 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; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 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. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 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.

As I've mentioned before, my family didn't go to church when I was growing up, but one summer when I was 9 or 10, my mom signed me up for a week of Vacation Bible School. I don't remember a lot of the details, but I do remember that the theme for the week was the 10 Commandments. Now all I knew of the 10 commandments I learned from the movie starring Charlton Heston as Moses, which wasn't really big on the details.

So we learned what the commandments were but when it came to the seventh commandment, the details were especially ambiguous. And in case you don't recall the commandments immediately, the seventh commandment is the one about adultery. As you can imagine the kind folks running this program were a little squeamish and vague in covering this one and perhaps they hadn't really thought through their thematic choice.

Overall, as I recall, I was pretty impressed by this VBS, and with God. I mean, we didn't go to church, but I wasn't exactly an atheist, I was just mostly ignorant and ambivalent about the whole thing. So I really wanted to take this stuff seriously; but most of them didn't seem to really apply to me so much. I wasn't killing people or stealing and lying a whole lot and my neighbors didn't own any slaves, donkeys or oxen. But adultery, now that was one I could really get behind because in my youthful mind, I presumed that adultery meant that children should do adult things, like drinking and smoking and swearing. I was very committed to not doing those things.

Of course I was wildly off-track, and I think that's something that probably happens to us more than we'd like to admit when it comes to hearing and responding to the Bible's words. All of us are limited in our ability to understand the Bible, even if we could read it in the original languages in which it

was written, we'd still be limited by our inability to interpret the Scriptures outside the horizon of our own experiences.

In the same way that we can't follow directions delivered in a foreign language that is unknown to us, we can't follow God's will if it's expressed in ways that we don't understand because we don't have the vocabulary, the experience, or the imagination to really understand them.

That's one of the reasons that the greatest gift Jesus gave us was the community of the church. Through the experience and the traditions of the whole church, from that first generation of believers right up to the people sitting in the pews around us, we understand the Scriptures best when we explore them in community with others.

Faith is not a solitary exercise, it is a group activity, because it is only when we gather together, with all of our accumulated and gathered knowledge and led by the Holy Spirit that we can truly discern and answer God's invitation.