

“Love God and do as you please” (Martin Luther)

A message for Whitehorse United Church

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Hebrew Scripture: Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9. 12-20

Psalm 19

Epistle Reading: Philippians 3: 4b-14

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21: 33-46

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts bring us closer to you O, God, our strength and our Redeemer.

Bev and I were chatting about this service while sitting at a table in Croatia...her words – The text is rich this fall...is it ever! There is so much in the readings for today that I had to make a decision – focus on one thing, or look at several pieces of lessons. I decided to look at several pieces – however, there is an overarching theme!

In today’s Old Testament lesson, the 10 commandments (also called the Decalogue) are delivered to Moses.

“The giving of the law to Moses at Sinai marks a pivotal moment in God’s unfolding story of salvation for the Israelites. The commandments provide clear, succinct, fundamental principles for the life of the community, where one’s relationship to God is inextricably linked to one’s relationship to neighbour. The common thread of relationship with God/ relationship with neighbour can, in fact, be traced through each of this week’s lessons.” (Keeping Holy Time, Year A pg. 332)

The shall not’s: “with the exception of the fourth and fifth commandments the Decalogue is stated as a series of prohibitions, often seen as negatives. The intention, however, was to stress by contrast with what was prohibited, that which was good and acceptable in the life of the community”. (Keeping Holy Time, Year A pg. 323).

Something to think about: Aside from the absolutes of the law, an individual is free to live in response to God's love. This is close to Martin Luther's summary of Christian ethics uttered centuries later: "Love God and do as you please" (Keeping Holy Time, Year A, pg 323) – the question for me becomes, do we need more than this?

Love God and do as you please. Your relationship with God informs how you live in community. How you work with and alongside your neighbours. The promise and the act of loving God doesn't mean simply stating that you love God and then you run off and literally do as you please. Kind of a cop out....I can still love God and do what I want, no matter the impact or consequence. The act of loving God is complete – it requires commitment from us – it requires thought, requires conscious decision making. When I prepare for a message, I read the scriptures and then let my mind wander for a week or so....part of my shotgun approach to life. While letting my mind ponder the concept of loving God and doing as you please....I thought of that saying that became a very popular t-shirt. WWJD question mark. What Would Jesus Do?. Luther's statement asks more of us....asks us to think about how we want to live in community and in this world....asks us – what does God want us to do.

Most of you have heard me preach before and as you know, I love movies...and I love to weave a movie into every message. I have friends in the congregation who have said to me – when you preach we can't wait to find out what movie we have to watch next. For me, finding a movie to relate to scripture makes the scripture more real. I have, however, wondered if maybe it trivializes readings. I have thought many times this week about the readings and my final thought is that in no way are either trivial – the movie, or, of course the readings.

I believe that anything that can help us interpret and understand scripture is a good thing. Shelves full of books have been published with interpretation and opinion, articles, documentaries – all to add to our understanding. And as a point of interest – I find it fascinating that so many movies can be linked to the bible – my guess....it points to how real the bible is – how those age old, human, themes can be made current.

So...the question – what movie did I choose for today. Well....I will admit to it being a repeat! But one that bears using again! The Shawshank Redemption is one of my favourite movies. It has a solid plot and brilliant actors. Starring Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins, it is set in the late 40's at Shawshank State Prison. Tim Robbins is Andy, his relationship with Freeman's character, called Red

is the central relationship in the movie. Andy has many adventures in prison, this is movie world after all. The character is focused on freedom – of illustrating to other inmates how they can have freedom, even locked in a prison cell. Red has been in desperate need of this kind of hope...this vision of freedom. All the while, Andy is using a small rock hammer to tunnel his way out of his own cell. Andy does eventually escape...and later after Red is paroled, they reunite in Mexico.

Andy as Moses figure – leading, inspiring, bringing hope; a prisoner who finds freedom and shows his friend the way to the promised land.

The continued theme of relationship with God – relationship with others.

The reading from Matthew this morning is the parable of the vineyard. This parable also appears in Mark and Luke.....but not John! Bev would be so happy that I was listening when she does the bible trivia. If a story doesn't appear in a Gospel, it is most often John that differs.

This lesson has three strong images: the vineyard, the rejected stone and the cornerstone. Any of these three could be a full sermon on its own but today I will touch on all three!

The Vineyard - an image we have seen before – a vineyard destroyed in Isaiah because it would only bear wild grapes or the image as Christ the vine. Highlighted in this retelling is the necessity of producing fruit befitting the realm of God, a theme found throughout Matthew. Such fruit is the result of complete obedience to God as lived out in the community of faith (Keeping Holy Time, Year A, pg 325). This account allows the listeners to implicate themselves in the conclusion.

Rejected Stone – the parable illustrates that if the original tenants did not produce the fruits of the kingdom, they would be cast out for tenants who would – whose lives would bear fruit. It's almost like watching the light switch on - The Pharisees are able to see themselves and understand that simple adherence to the law is not enough. (Keeping Holy Time, Year A, pg 325)

The Cornerstone – the image of the cornerstone, rejected by the builders, pronounces a message of vindication; God's purpose cannot be thwarted. For the faithful, God is a refuge, a sure foundation.

God's reign cannot be built on a foundation without the cornerstone of Christ. A new community, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, would consist of all who faithfully respond to God's call. The message of vindication is the message of Easter. Simple adherence to the law does not guarantee tenantry (or membership) in the realm of God. (Keeping Holy Time, Year A, pg 325)

So, here's the thing.... The way we live maybe defined by prohibitions – but the way we choose to be in relationship with God and community is in the pieces that are not defined – the pieces where we make decisions about what to do are in the white space outside of the list of 10.

Love God and do as you please.

Amen