

Deut 8:1-10  
Eph 4:30-5:2  
John 6:37-51

[Yr. B we get four Gospel texts from John 6; 24-35, 37-51, 53-59, 60-69]

Moses represents the good shepherd of the Hebrew Covenant, the mediator who encountered God, listened to God, responded to God, and shared with the people the commands given by God – for the purpose of building community and being in relationship with God. The commands are given for the common good. If you obey these commands, you will live and occupy the land that the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors. Remember how the Lord led you in the wilderness to humble you, test you, letting you hunger, then being fed with manna, so that you would know that you do not live by bread alone. Keep the commandments by walking in his ways and fearing him. For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, flowing streams, wheat, vines, fig trees, olive trees and honey, where you may eat bread without scarcity, lack nothing, ...you shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you” (Deut 8:1-10). When Moses has reminded the people about the covenant in chapter 8, they are then told they are about to cross the Jordan River – that very day, to possess the land. What are the commands Moses refers to? In summary form they are the Ten Commandments:

- You shall love the Lord your God and have no other gods.
- You shall not make an idol of anything or anyone.
- You shall not misuse the name of the Lord.
- You shall observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
- You shall honor your father and your mother.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness.
- You shall not covet. (Deut 5:6-21)

I wonder what the assembled crowd was thinking when they heard what they could and could not do. If we read carefully the book of Deuteronomy there are many blessings and curses that follow as consequences to being obedient or disobedient to the commands of God. Consequentialist thinking is popular in ethics as well as in biblical discourse. We want to understand why good and bad things happen and

we want to make good things happen and deter bad things...so we try to match actions, inactions, with desired and undesired consequences. We try to explain why things happen as they do. We try to avoid conflict, chaos, pain, sorrow, grief, broken relationships, and we want protection from those who will hurt us, harm our bodies, our friends, family, or steal our possessions. We want to be safe and secure, happy and content. Even if consequences are predictable, we are very clever and construct context of a situation in a way that makes the actions we want to take justifiable.

For example, the first four commandments tell us that God is first in all things – no competing thing, person, or commitment can take the place of God...we need to be in a relationship with God that is in perspective – God is God and there is no other. Seeking to know God, invites God to reveal God’s self to us. We can tell others about the God we worship, but every person must come to know God in their own time and place...in their own context. We can trust God – and that process is like conversion – life long. Faith begins by acknowledging that God is. . . discovering that God loves me-you-every person without exception. It is that last part that causes most of us difficulty – realizing that we are not the only persons that God loves.

Our walk in faith is like the Israelites leaving Egypt, finding the wilderness barren, the food insufficient, and Moses not such a charismatic fellow that they wanted to hear the same commands and conditions day after day. Enough already – where is that Promised Land with milk and honey? The more they grumbled the longer the journey became until finally we have Moses remembering the journey on the eve before they are to cross the Jordan River...but Moses is not going to cross with them but remain behind for being disobedient. We all know time in our lives when the journey is tiring, the same old problems return, the pressures of family, of finances, of work, tear at our peaceful rested state of grace. Just when a mountain top experience of faith happens, something else happens that exposes what is unfinished in us. For example, I was rested and peaceful after days of fishing in beautiful lakes, streams, with majestic snow capped mountains in the distance, but after 20 hours of travel, squeezed into tight compartments, long lines of security clearance, and lack of sleep, the peace quickly faded. With the pressure of chairing a session for the conference on the first day and giving my paper after listening to many others fatigue began to set in. Traveling 30 hours to arrive home at 1 am and be at Rainbow camp 8 hours later, the effects of vacation had evaporated and the tasks at hand proved challenging. It will take time for

the reflections of the conference and the camp to sink in, take root and bring forth new insights. What I can say now is simply how pleased I am to be home, to be part of this parish that does amazing things for others. You renew my faith every time I watch how much you give out of your own faith experience. Some of the members of this parish have had very little sleep in this past week and have given from the depth of their being to provide a chance for children to experience a community where patient-loving presence is the message of faith. Tolerance, willingness to learn from others whose experience is so different from our own is part of the journey, for God is the God of all of humanity.

We believe but if we are alert and honest we also lack the confidence to trust God with the important things – like our children, grandchildren, some special project, or our career. Trusting God can be difficult and it can lead us into painful experiences. To walk by faith requires more than a logical mind that can calculate the consequences of choices and try to predetermine the actions that will bring about good ends. Jesus refers to himself as the bread of life – as the one who has come down from heaven to do the will of the Father... a new bread, unequal to the manna in the wilderness – this bread is the bread of life for the “bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” (Jn 6:51)

The commandments teach us to let God have first place in our lives – to respect other persons by not taking what is theirs, not being jealous of their possessions or gifts, and not taking away their dignity by acts, words, or inactions.

Do not kill, steal, and covet, what belongs to another person. In short, these commandments tell us that every person is important to God, even the person who treats us disrespectfully, accuses us of something we either did not do, or misunderstood our intentions. We live in a complex world – a world in which war is a reminder of how far we are from the imperative to not kill. As the crisis in the Middle East continues week by week, and as we continue our struggle with ideologies that deny the validity of other worldviews, we must continue to pray for peace in this world – to ask for forgiveness for the wrongs we have done and those done on our behalf. The resources of the physical world are not uniformly distributed in our world today. Some people have too much food, money, possessions, while others don't have enough. There must be a way to redistribute the good things in order that every person has enough and that strategy is neither easy nor is it painless. In order for every person to have enough, some will

have to give up what gives them security or comfort. Some will have to sacrifice if we are to overcome the struggle for world peace, for world health, for human dignity.

In sum, the Ten Commandments give us a blueprint for the rights of human persons – right to life – the right to health – to shelter – to companionship. Human beings deserve to have human rights simply because they are human. Human rights is a modern conception that recognizes the dignity of every person. If you believe that God loves you and cares for you, then you must consider the possibility that every person matters to God in the same way that you do. Faith calls us to see the other person as also important to God. Faith also calls forth within us a compassion that cares for the other – that will be willing to forgive offenses, release resentment for mistreatment, bring peace into conflict, and be willing to suffer if necessary to be present with those God has given us as neighbor.

The commandments give us a perspective about God and neighbor – how to live in faith and how to live with others in this world. Jesus' gift of self was that we might have life, now and eternally. Taking the bread metaphor to heart we know that Jesus is both the word by which we live and the bread that sustains us in living. We are shaped into the likeness of Christ by word and sacrament and Jesus tells us that both are revealed in the incarnate presence of Jesus – the divine is human, making the human divine. What Jesus descended to become – one of us – he also rose to make us part of the divine reality that is life eternal. To achieve the integration of our faith in living example, we must take in the word of God and the bread of life – the living presence of God with us, in us, and through us.

Jesus shows us that God works through human form to reveal divine love. Jesus calls us to love others in the same way we are loved. God works through us as we live and serve those within reach. Come to God's table, take the bread of life and let it nourish your faith, and renew you for service to God's people everywhere.