

2008-09-3 Exodus 20:1-6 We believe in one true God.

Pentecost 5 July 5, 2009

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior.

God's Word for us and our nation is written in Exodus 20:1-6

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Holy Spirit, all divine, dwell within this heart of mine; cast down every idol throne, reign supreme, and reign alone! Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

As we celebrate the independence of our nation this weekend, many people are saying that our country is in a crisis. In the past our country has dealt with crisis in war, in the economy or severe weather. Christians have prayed through these crisis: for our troops and for peace, for people to be able to get back to work, and for good and seasonable weather. But, there is another crisis today, which mainly goes unnoticed by the media, regarding morality. A growing number of people in our nation don't know the true God and what He demands of them as God. If we asked people on the street to say the 10 Commandments, how many would know three? Those with a Christian education would probably get most, but others might guess ones like don't steal, don't murder, or don't lie. The commandments that most people forget are the first three that cover our relationship with God. According to Jesus, the first Commandment about God is the greatest. So, what are we as Christians to do regarding this moral crisis in our country? Over the next 10 weeks we are going to review the 10 Commandments so that we might better apply them to our own lives. Also, we need to pray for the people of our nation and use the Commandments so that others might be guided and blessed by God's truth. Our theme this morning is

### **We believe in one true God!**

**First, God has established a claim for our loyalty.** Before giving the people of Israel the Commandments God reminded them who He was and what He had done. He said, *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."* (v.2) He said "I am," which describes not a vague force in the universe or a man-made image. He is one God, yet three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If people don't believe in the triune God, they don't have God revealed Himself in His Word. Throughout the Bible we have seen that God was faithful to keep His promises. He not only chose Israel as His people, He rescued them from being slaves in Egypt using plagues that showed God's greatness over other gods. God had every right to demand Israel's loyalty.

Why does God make a claim on us? God created all things by His powerful Word, including each of us. Think of all creation, how God made each thing for a purpose. He made plants to flower, trees for fruit, cows to give milk, birds to fly, and people to ---. What are people created to do? God made us to receive His love and respond in love and devotion to Him. The rest of nature continues to do what God made it to do. But, what happened to us? People, from Adam and Eve on have looked for love and relationships everywhere but with God. And God has so much to offer not just as our Creator, but through Jesus as our Savior. He wants to forgive our sins. He has prepared a place for all people in heaven to spend eternity with Him. If someone who loved you built your perfect house and offered you \$1,000's of dollars each week live in it, wouldn't he be upset if you refused to walk in the door? God has done so much more for us. He has a right to require our love and respect to Him for Him. It is the same with our nation. We have protection, freedom, and have experienced many blessings in our country. Should we show loyalty to a different country after receiving this benefits? No. We pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the country for which it stands, one nation, under God...." All the more we should have an allegiance to God for life!

**Second, God calls for a response from us.** He commanded, *"You shall have no other gods before me.* (v.3) God is telling us not just to put Him first and all other gods second. He is saying that He wants to be the only God ruling our lives. None of us would consider having an idol in our homes. So, how does this commandment apply

to us? Martin Luther wrote in the Large Catechism, “That upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god.” So, to have no other gods is to not let the influence of people become greater than God’s influence on us. Instead of trying to have God conform to our ideas, we constantly seek to conform our ways to Him being guided by His Word. Whatever we do whether at church or home or anywhere is to be to the glory of God.

In giving us this commandment, God threatens to punish all who break it. He said, “*I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing ... those who hate me.*” (v5) God wants us for Himself. He knows the danger when people replace Him with other things. When parents sin and rebel against God and they not only harm themselves but their children are kept away from God, too. It becomes difficult for future generations in that family to hear of Jesus. This should send a warning to all Christians, that they remain diligent in God’s Word and faith. God wants all people to be with Him in heaven. He promised to “*love to a thousand generations of those who love [Him] and keep [His] commandments.*” (v.6) Luther stated our response to God, “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

What does it mean to fear God? It does not mean fearing judgment for our sins. Christ took that punishment! In Christ, we are God’s dear children, not His slaves. So, fear means to have a loving respect. If you have a mother that cares for you, loves you, and is easily disappointed when you fail her, you want to do everything you can to follow her will for you. So, it is with God. We want to do our best to honor Him. We don’t want to disappoint Him. Yet, there are times when we sin with anger, lust, greed, or we have a greater respect for people, ourselves, or things more than God. For those sins, we pray, “Lord have mercy on us for Christ’s sake and help us honor You!”

We are to love God. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment, He said, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” (Mark 12:30) How can we have this kind of love for God? In life we will never be perfect, but “*we love because He first loved us.*” (1 John 4:19) Our love for Him will show in how we treat others. John wrote, “*If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.* (1 John 4:20) The more we learn about God and His ways of love the more we can speak the truth in love and express our love for God.

Last, we are to trust in God above all things. We trust in God for eternal life. So, we are to trust in God in daily life. When there are problems, true trust puts our concerns in God’s hands and leaves them there! If we are not trusting in God to work everything for our good, then we are trusting in something else which is not reliable or powerful enough to help us always. How much better it is to trust in God, who knows us and has cared our whole lives! How much better to trust in Christ who gave His life to make us God’s children and who daily forgives us! How much better to trust in the Holy Spirit who gave us faith and who brings us comfort through His Word!

So, what can we do for our country in this moral crisis? We can pray daily for it. We can also better learn the ways of God so that we can explain to others what kind of loving God sets limits in His commandments for our good. We can let people know that our ultimate help is not in our country’s leaders, or in Wall Street, or in our armies. We trust in God, and we are willing to follow His ways. For God’s ways are right. His ways are blessing. His ways are truth. His ways are life! Amen. The peace of God...