

## ***“Echoes of the Heart”***

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**The economic crisis and the Ten Commandments.** As we Americans find ourselves mired in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression back in the late 1920's and throughout the 30's, signals of alarm are all about.

What does it all mean?

In spite of the recent *bailout* legislation passed by congress, credit contraction is still *the* major issue as financial markets struggle to find a path to recovery. Millions of us around the country can't help but wonder: are we going to be alright? Three months from now, six months, a year and beyond??

In reflecting on all this, it occurred to me how the Ten Commandments—some of the core teachings of our religious and cultural traditions—have a word for us about the wider experience of these calamitous economic times.

For me, the Ten Commandments are *big*. What makes them *big* is how they reveal what God knows about us.

Keep in mind that these *guidelines* for living didn't just fall out of the sky one day, or come thundering down the mountain inscribed in tablets of stone. They evolved over centuries of oral tradition and unfolding wisdom and teaching. They survived in their current form because, at the end of the day, they worked. They were functional.

And what was their function or purpose? To preserve life.

*Life* is God's hill to die on. It is sacred; it is what God is about. Giving life, ennobling life, preserving life, renewing life, resurrecting life. The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to preserve life.

**Regulating greed.** As we move forward through this economic meltdown, most experts point to the need for greater regulation and oversight. Straight away, this is the function the Commandments serve as well. They are *regulators* and *overseers* of community life—again, to preserve life.

What God knows about us is that without some element of regulation and oversight (not to excess, of course), our lives easily get knocked off track. Things get distorted and we lose our sense of harmony and balance. Just as with the economic crisis, we lose sight of the *big picture*.

From a biblical point of view, God gave us the Ten Commandments to protect us from our worst impulses—namely, in these critical economic times, greed. Greed is the omnipresent *sin* of America.

Don't get me wrong, we Americans have a whole slew of virtues. We are generous, creative, and resourceful; we are tolerant (for the most part), compassionate (we tend to root for the underdog), and good hearted. We want to be *good* people; and, at our best, we want to serve God's purposes.

Still, because of the nature of our market-driven economy, along with the lure of *the American dream* (whatever that is), we have tendencies and impulses which, if not checked, easily spill over to greed. Clearly, greed underlies the root causes of our financial crises—greed at multiple levels, starting with the housing market.

**Commandment wisdom.** Of the Ten Commandments, specifically, Commandments four and ten are *big* for American culture.

The fourth Commandment, ***Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy***, has to do with *rest* and *time for recovery*. It emphasizes the need to take care of ourselves in body, mind and spirit.

Easily, in American culture, we get caught up in frenzied striving, thinking we need all this stuff: things, possessions, a new this, a better that—all to the point where we lose perspective. What God knows in this Commandment is that, over time, excessive striving kills and leads to dysfunction in all of life.

The tenth Commandment, ***You shall not covet***, refers to *wanting* too much and *wanting* the wrong things as well. Coveting is greed based and, over time, it, too, kills and keeps us from our best self.

In the larger picture, these Commandments function like regulators and overseers for our lives. They remind us *who* we are and *who* God calls us to be and become.

**A word of hope.** Although things may well get worse with our economy before they get better, make no mistake: we'll make it to the other side. One of our greatest strengths as Americans is that we are a resilient people. Not only are we hard-working (sometimes to excess), but—always—we're a nation of tremendous resolve and ingenuity.

We'll figure it out and we'll respond. We always do.

For all of us, the *key* is to make good decisions ... with no short-cuts ... seeking, every day, to do the *right* thing; and all the time, keeping *the big picture* of our lives in mind.