

## “What God knows”

October 5, 2008

Text: *Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20, Matthew 7:24-29*

### I.

As we Americans find ourselves in the throes of perhaps the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression (late 20's, throughout the 30's, and leading into World War II), understandably, all the talk and buzz these days is about the economy.

What does it all mean? What are the short-term and long-term implications? For all of us ... at whatever stage we find ourselves in our life journey. My guess is that financial planners are busy and bankers are busy—along with economists and politicians; everybody trying to understand it all and make some sense of it all.

With the economic rescue, bailout legislation that passed the House on Friday, again, what does it all mean? Are we going to be alright?

Our **Lectionary** reading for this morning from the Old Testament is the **Exodus** version of the **Ten Commandments** (there's another version in Deuteronomy 5). Interestingly enough, these Commandments have something to teach us about these shaky economic times.

### II.

I've always been awed by the **Ten Commandments** and the foundational role they play—not just in religious life, but in all of life. They're big. What makes them big is how they reveal what God knows about us. In any event, these commandments loom over us—always—as guidelines for life.

When we give these Commandments a chance to breathe (to speak to us within their historical context), they have some serious wisdom to pass on. In other words, they can teach us things about ourselves that we can benefit from.

1. First off, a word about these Commandments. They 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 learning.

They survived in their current form because, at the end of the day, they worked; they were relevant, they were functional. And what was their purpose? To preserve life.

2. And that's the second point; because *that's God's thing*—LIFE. Life is sacred; and *life* is what God is about: giving life ... ennobling life ... preserving life ... resurrecting life. The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to preserve life.

### III.

With all the reflective discussion these days about regulation and oversight of the financial markets, that's the function these Commandments serve. That's what they do. They're like *regulators* and *overseers* of community life ... again, to preserve LIFE.

You see, what God knows 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 balance and harmony. Just like with our economic crisis, we lose sight of the BIG PICTURE.

God gave us the Commandments to protect us and save us from our worst impulses. Why? Again, because God knows. And what God knows is that SIN hovers near by.

- Sin is the inborn human tendency to see things too much in terms of our own self-interest.

Certainly, in the case of the financial crisis, there was plenty of sin to go around.

1. People in the housing industry—realtors, lenders, bankers, so called experts of all kinds.
2. People at all levels of the financial markets ... *looking out for number one*. Unchecked GREED. Not all the time; but in too many cases.

Let's take a look at the Commandments, particularly at two of them, Commandments four and ten.

### IV.

The first three Commandments are about our relationship with God ... our sense of God's holiness ... how God is number one, worthy in every way of our respect, our awe and our obedience.

The FOURTH Commandment is a big one for our American culture, and particularly for us in these challenging, financially stressed times: ***Observe the SABBATH and keep it holy.***

What God knows, through this 4<sup>th</sup> **Commandment** is that we all need rest and time for recovery. As biblical scholars have noted through the years, *even God rested on the seventh day.*

What's notable about the Commandments—particularly as we all reflect on the economic crisis we're experiencing in our country—is that many of them have to do with greed at some point. And of course greed is the underlying sin that prompted the crisis in our financial markets to begin with. Greed is the omnipresent sin of American life.

Let's tell some truth about ourselves.

**Many of us work too hard** ... and do not take the time we need for rest ... time for recovery, as the 4<sup>th</sup> Commandment advises. We get too caught up in achieving the American dream ... and then we have to work harder and with longer hours to pay for it ... and it becomes a vicious cycle with no end in sight.

What happens to us through our market-driven economy, with no regulation to keep us from our worst impulses, is we become convinced that we need all this stuff ... things ... possessions ... a new this, a better that ... whatever it is.

We lose perspective on things. One of the benefits of SABBATH rest is precisely that it gives us renewed perspective.

1. When our minds, souls and spirits are better rested ... when we've had time for reflection, we're healthier people.
2. When we have more discretionary time for family and friends, we're happier people.

What God knows is that when we don't take care of our body and spirit, the LIFE to which God calls us becomes compromised ... and we are less able to be alive to God's purposes ... alive to love and all that that means.

What God knows is that we have to take care of our body and spirit ... and when we don't—always—we pay a price; and that price has a ripple affect on our whole life ... our relationships ... our health ... our spirit and on and on.

## V.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment is to *honor our father and mother* who, of course, have given us life, the very *gift of life* that is so sacred in God's sight. Of course, this all becomes complicated when we have parents who are perhaps abusive and *not* promoting life's purposes themselves.

Commandments six through nine are obvious prohibitions which, when not observed, bring untold pain and disharmony into our community life.

Thou shall not kill ... commit adultery ... steal ... and bear false witness. Violation of these Commandments disrupts and distorts community life on multiple levels and ultimately threatens the very LIFE of the community itself.

Again, God knows.

The TENTH Commandment is another BIG Commandment for us and our market-driven American culture: ***Thou shall not covet ...*** which refers to *wanting* too much. Coveting is greed based. It's wanting, wanting, wanting ... too much and the wrong things ... and at times in ways that blur what is truthful and honest and healthy.

1. Buying the house we cannot afford.
2. As a realtor, selling the house to the buyer whom we know lacks the income to make the payments.
3. As the lender, approving a loan we know is not sufficiently backed up—all, to meet the profits goals that management sets.

At every level, greed. Again, God knows ... and what God knows is that we have these tendencies, these desires that at times become ... excessive; and therefore, **Thou shall not covet.**

## VI.

These Commandments are life-saving ... for us ... and for our families and our communities. They seek to *regulate* our desires and behaviors. They *oversee* our decisions and let us know when we're getting off base ... or off track ... or are losing perspective ... forgetting who we are.

What God knows is if left to our own nature, our own impulses ... with no guidelines, with no oversight or regulation, with no checks at all against our excesses in want and desire, we can mess up our lives. And at times mess up our lives in ways that threaten the entire community.

**Matthew 7** sums it all up for us in this familiar story ... taken from *THE MESSAGE*, the Bible in contemporary language. These words of Jesus ...

*These words I speak to you ...are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who builds his house on solid rock. Rain came, the river flooded, hurricanes struck ...but nothing moved the house ...because it was fixed to the rock.*

*But if you pay no attention to my words, you're like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm came and the waves rose up, the house fell.*

And the people were amazed at his teaching.

Well enough, friends, but where are we in all of this? Without a doubt, we're in the midst of some tough times. And things may very well get worse before they get better. There's a whole world of unknowns out there ... and there's no one person that really

knows ... who has all the answers ... who can tell us what we need to do and when. We will most likely have some sacrificial months, if not years, before us.

But guess what? We'll make it through. One of the best things about us Americans is that we are a resilient people. Not only are we hard working (sometimes to excess), but we're a nation of tremendous resolve and ingenuity. We'll make it to the other side.

The KEY, for all of us, 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 in mind.

And in all things—everyday—honor life by loving our neighbor as ourselves.

And may we all live a long and blessed life.

**All praise be unto God! Amen!**

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