

## **“Grounded in God, Growing into Loving Community”**

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

October 4, 2020

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.<sup>1</sup>

The first two commandments centre around grounding ourselves in our Creator - the other commandments have to do with community; loving your neighbour as you love yourself. At least, that was how the Rabbi Jesus summed it up in the Gospel. There is more to it, of course. But, at its essence, do the commandments *not* come down to this?

Because God first loved you and I, we care for ourselves in tandem with caring for, loving, our neighbours. The challenge is found in the details, loving our neighbours.

While studying theology, I was elected (or voluntold, perhaps) to be a part of a national ecumenical conference planning team. That is, Christian seminaries and theological schools across the country sent students to talk about, pray together, and grapple with how to work together. The leadership team comprised completely of students priests and pastors and academics-in-training from a very wide array of Christian traditions; we had women bringing a very modern, liberal faith perspective along with men training to be priests who tended to bring a much more traditional, and high liturgical perspective. Whether or not women could, or wanted to, lead certain liturgy was debated hotly!

Who knew that Christians had so much diversity? Well, actually the Gospels frequently convey a picture of disciples bickering and not getting what Jesus was saying. The book of Acts and Epistles of the Christian Scriptures show major fault lines within the infant church. Especially clashing within the Jesus movement were the earnest, purity-focused, Jews and the newer, enthusiastic, Gentile converts.

By the way, you might wonder how that ecumenical conference went. In spite of our theological skirmishes, we were exhausted, frustrated, but I believe that the leadership team made faithful decisions and we learned a great deal about the height & width and depth of Christ's love as it becomes enfleshed among us.

It is challenging to love our neighbour, especially when we differ within our own religious family.

Consider our literal families, what our supper tables look like when we get the extended family together. Uncork that bottle of wine, and we truly learn to love one another. The rubber of Loving our neighbours hits the road, so to speak when our closest neighbours, our family, perhaps even our dysfunctional family. Picture that extended family at table one Thanksgiving in your memory; uncle Bob brings up politics and the merits of Donald Trump, knowing full well sister, Aunt Susan, sees red.

---

<sup>1</sup> Exodus chapter 20 verse 2. *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Grandma quietly, authoritatively, lifts her hand in the air and quietly asks for quiet. She reminds us of our heritage; the ups and downs that we have been through. Her cadence steady as she reminds us that we might not agree on things, perhaps bitterly disagree on some.

“God loves us all, we are blessed to have this food and family,” she says.

“Amen!” The children reply.

This day we celebrate the holy catholic church, meaning the universal church; Roman Catholic, Anglican, Baptist, Pentecostal, the different Orthodox traditions, Lutheran. The list goes on until we mention also the comparatively young United Church of Canada.

Which brings me to the context of the Ten Commandments. That opening statement of the Decalogue: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

God loved God’s children so much that, in spite of their bickering, God initiated this covenant, this pact grounded in a promise. Promises will be broken on the part of God’s children, Israel, but God’s promise will be kept, God will continue to love them forever. God loved the beloved children enough to be enfleshed, to live among humankind<sup>2</sup>, to love unconditionally, and to die, still loving and forgiving. What a legacy of love we inherit. Now, it is time to live it. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> The Gospel of John, chapter 1, verse 14

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+1%3A14&version=MSG>