

**The Ten(der) Commandments
World Communion Sunday
Exodus 20: 1-4; 7-9; 12-20
Don Lincoln**

The boy was 11 years old and went fishing every chance he got from a dock at his family's cabin on a New Hampshire lake.

On the evening before bass season opened, he and his father were fishing at sunset and into the evening, catching bluegills with worms. Then the boy tied on a small silver lure to practice casting for opening day. The lure hit the water and caused silver ripples in the moon's reflection on the lake.

Then it struck. When his fishing pole doubled over, he knew something huge was on the line. His father watched with admiration as the young boy skillfully worked the fish to the dock, and gently lifted the fish from the water.

It was the largest fish he had ever caught. And it was a bass. The boy and his father looked at the beautiful fish in the moonlight. The father looked at his watch. It was 10 p.m. – two hours before the season opened. He looked at the fish, then at the boy. "You'll have to put it back, son."

"Dad!" cried the boy.

"There will be another fish," said his father.

"Not ever as big as this one!" The boy looked around the lake. Nobody in sight. He looked again at his father but could tell by his father's face the decision was not negotiable.

He worked the hook out of the lip of the huge bass and lowered it into the water. The creature swished its powerful body and disappeared. The boy suspected that never again would he catch a fish that large.

That was 34 years ago. Today, the boy is a successful architect in New York City. He takes his own son and daughter fishing from the same dock. He was right. He has never again caught such a magnificent fish as the one he landed that night. But he **sees** that same fish – over and over – every time he comes up against a question of ethics in his daily life.

Do we do the right thing when no one is looking? Do we refuse to cut corners to get the design in on time? Do we refuse to trade stocks based on information we shouldn't have? Do we report everything on our taxes? We would be much more likely to if we were taught to put the fish back when we were young.

The decision to do right lives fragrantly in our memories. These are the stories we should tell our children and our grandchildren. Not about how we had a chance to beat the system and took it, but about how we did the right thing and were forever strengthened; made better.

Every culture develops rules for family, relationships, and things like killing and theft. In that sense, the Ten Commandments aren't unique. Some people find that upsetting. I find it reassuring. I **DO** believe God communicated with Jewish and Christian communities in very unique ways, and still does; but that doesn't mean God hasn't spoken into the hearts of others. Like Hammurabi for instance. Or anybody else who will listen.

The truth God has given to every tribe and every nation has been written on their heart scripture tells us and has always been something along these lines: "How you relate to each other is important. You need conventions that honor the needs of the individual and the needs of the community. You need laws that are fair, and life giving, and all inclusive." If all civilization would just listen.

Ten Commandments. Our first mistake is thinking of them only in the negative. But an even greater error is how our view of the commandments that way often shapes our thinking about God. Friends, rather than being prohibitive rules from an angry God, these **Ten(der) Commandments**¹ are an expression of God's love for us; God's gift to us. Fences, to keep us safe.

Perhaps, on this World Communion Sunday, when the world seems in such disarray, and beyond our capacity to change, each of us would do well to thank God for such guidance, and remember that imparting the simple, yet profound truths God has given us – imparting them to our children, our grandchildren, our neighbors, our employees, our leaders, our community – that's how a difference is made in the world. One person at a time.

As the old hymn says, "teach them over to me again, wonderful words of life. Beautiful words; wonderful words; ten(der) words, wonderful words of life.

May it be so. AMEN.

1. Ron Mehl, **The Ten(der) Commandments**, Multhomah Publishing, 1998.