



St. Stephen's Traditional Episcopal Church

11856 Mays Chapel Rd., Timonium, MD 21093

The First Sunday After Trinity, June 17th, 2007

✠ **In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen.** ✠

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy...soul." We are told in the book of Genesis how it was not until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life that the first man became a living soul. The soul is the animating principle that makes us alive to the world around us. To love God with all our souls is to love him in all of life—in every relationship and sphere of life.

There is no better place to turn for some definition of what this means than the Ten Commandments. Each of them addresses one or more of the spheres of our existence in which we experience life as living souls. Take the first commandment, *"Thou shalt have none other gods but me."* That speaks to the realm of religion. When God has your exclusive and zealous worship you are not defined by externals. God sees the heart. He doesn't judge by outward appearance which is the way the world thinks. This puts everything in perspective. Suddenly, the things that drove and defined you look very different. You are defined by someone who loves you for yourself and wants your worship in return.

The second commandment addresses the world of aesthetics: *"Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath or in the water under the earth."* The arts are an important aspect of the image of God. They engage the mind, the intuition, and the imagination. They communicate, provoke, and reveal. We should celebrate them as good ends in themselves not just when they fulfill a religious role.

What we learn from this commandment is the power of images. They determine how we think. Images shape societies. This is why we have a solemn warning connected to this commandment. It warns

us about the reverberation of sin down the generations. Just think of the way the Nazis used the arts in their seduction of the German people.

The third and ninth commandments address the faculty of speech. "Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain" and "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." The first of these commandments is principally about putting God's name to things he has nothing to do with. People feel the need to add, "The Lord said to me" to everything they want to do. It's a way to control people and situations. It's awfully hard to argue with Moses. Of course, this is often nothing more than manipulation, which is very unloving. If you love God you don't misrepresent him. If you add his name to something you had better have it right. Otherwise, it's a lot better to let an argument stand or fall on its own terms.

The ninth commandment speaks to the Church's besetting sin—gossip. You never quote anyone accurately, no matter how hard you try. You never duplicate their body language or the look in their eye. And God is not only concerned about how you represent him, he also has a stake in how you misrepresent his people.

The fourth commandment speaks to the world of work and commerce. The principle of the Sabbath is rooted in creation itself and reflects a cycle of six plus one that preserves life and sanctifies labor. Work is important. The first thing God did when he made man was put him to work. Inactivity can be devastating, which is why unemployment can destroy the soul. At the same time, enslavement to work leads to death. Heart disease and stroke are often the reward of the workaholic. That's what he gets for his idolatry. God legislated for his people one day in

seven to rest from their labors. God legislated for his people one day in seven to rest from their labors. The holy time of the Sabbath sanctifies regular time and gives it cosmic significance and meaning. It refreshes the human spirit, adding spiritual depth to the life lived in the six days of work. In setting apart the seventh day God established parameters in which we can enjoy his world without destroying ourselves.

The fifth commandment is accompanied by a unique promise: *“Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”* The prophet Ezekiel traced the captivity of Israel, in part, at least, to a failure to honor parents. The word honor means to give weight to. The opposite is to treat lightly. It’s been said that we have no respect for anything that’s more than twenty years old. This is so even for the Church which seems to love the new and has contempt for the old. What is tabooed today may be tolerated tomorrow, and what is tolerated today can turn into tomorrow’s taboo. This is why the Church will end up a widow if she marries herself to the culture. The issue here is the passing on of truth. That is the chief role of parents in the word of God, and God help us if we are so contemptuous of the past that we end up repeating it.

The sixth commandment addresses our attitude toward human life and its sanctity. The command is terse and unadorned: *“Thou shalt do no murder.”* The Westminster catechism helps us here where it states the prohibition positively, thus, laying out the issues involved here. *“The duties required in the sixth commandment,”* it says, *“include careful studies and lawful endeavors to preserve the lives of ourselves and others, by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all temptations, occasions, and practices which tend to the unjust taking away of the life of any.”*

The seventh commandment speaks to our sexuality: *“Thou shalt not commit adultery.”* This commandment addresses the problem of distorted sexual relationships, or more broadly, distorted human relationships. It recognizes that sexuality is wondrous and also dangerous—at once the source of incredible joy and terrible pain—so much anguish, so much recrimination, so much destruction is connected with our sexuality. On the other hand, lovers of God celebrate physical pleasure within divine parameters.

The eighth commandment: *“Thou shalt not steal”* establishes the right of private property. Here again, lovers of God live within limits. And the tenth

commandment, *“Thou shalt not covet”* addresses the realm of thought and ambition. If the Ten Commandments begin with false ideas about God they end with false ideas about self. *If only I could have that I would be happy. If I could have a wife or a husband who looked like that, or a bigger car or a nicer house I would be a better person,* and, of course, they are all lies.

The commandments of God speak to every relationship we enjoy in this world. What we must never forget is that they were given to a redeemed people. Israel had been brought out of the house of slavery in Egypt, and now, at Sinai, they were being shown how free people live. In other words, these commandments define those who love God with all their souls—with the totality of their lives and relationships of life.

The father of psycho-therapy Sigmund Freud had contempt for religion, especially the Christian religion because, he said, it attempts to *“procure a certainty of happiness.”* Of course, he dedicated his life to trying to understand the source of unhappiness. But the human problem is not that people want a certainty of happiness; it is that they look for it in the wrong places. In many respects that is what the law is talking about. People violate the law because they pursue happiness in the wrong places. They look for it from false gods. They think they can find it by stretching the limits.

William Bridge was a puritan writer who wrote, *“A thing is never said to be full till it be full of that for which it was made.”* There is an incredible amount of emptiness in our world. We have more in the way of possessions than any generation before us yet we feel more anxious, more disquieted, more uncomfortable in our skin than any other generation. Could it be that in all our fullness we are not full of that for which we were made? We were made to love God. *Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength,* then and only then will you achieve the purpose of your existence, and be full of that for which you were made.

To the Only Wise God, Our Saviour, be Glory and Majesty, Dominion and Power, Both Now and Forever. AMEN.