

Rev. Adrienne Meier

**March 10, 2021, Midweek Service for the Third Week in Lent
St. Thomas Lutheran Church, Bloomington, Indiana**

You Might As Well Love

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words: 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. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Our lives are governed by hundreds of thousands of rules and regulations written to protect person and property: traffic laws, tax laws, zoning laws, emergency laws, rules about the care of children and the elderly, rules about exactly how many chickens and how few roosters you can own, rules about exactly which frequencies my microphone can occupy. Our lives are governed by all these laws, but, as Christians, we maintain that *ten* commandments, given on Mount Sinai to Moses and from Moses to the people, are the ten best ways to live. Are they enough?

On the one hand, the six hundred thirteen rules in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy that follow the giving of the Ten Commandments suggest that they are perhaps 10 is *not* enough. The legal codes of even small municipalities suggest they are not enough. And, religious freedom laid aside for a mere moment, the rules of schools and malls, libraries and museums suggest they are not enough. Ten rules - and two of them phrased not as "thou shalt not" - simply do not seem enough to regulate our complex lives.

Truth be told, much of our life is unregulated, really. Nothing requires us to be polite or kind to our neighbor. Nothing keeps us from expressing our rage at being cut off in traffic or being annoyed about a neighbor's choice of potted plants. Nothing tells us the right way to express our love for our children or our parents. Nothing can keep us from hating each other. Most of our lives are lived, as Ralph Klein, Professor Emeritus of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago noted, most of our lives are lived where there are no laws. And so we are largely free—a freedom that comes with great responsibility. “In freedom,” Klein notes, “we maximize our love for God and neighbor.”

This is largely Luther's point in the Small Catechism. It isn't about what we are *not* to do, but about our responsibility to love God and love our neighbor. It isn't just that we not bear false witness, essentially, that we do not commit perjury, but that we protect our neighbor's good name. It is not just that we do not murder, but that we preserve our neighbor's life. Not just that we are not jealous of what our neighbor has, but that we help them keep what is theirs. The Commandments offer us the opportunity to always choose the loving thing, even if it is at disadvantage to ourselves. Because the bottom line is this, we could live our lives from rule to rule, making them and breaking them, always in service...of what? Where do the rules leave us? We could live our lives from rule to rule or we could live our lives in love as it expands like the universe touching and changing everything.

I shared this poem last week with the little group of us that meets to pray on Wednesdays. It is called “The Facts of Life” by Pádraig Ó Tuama. It seems the right place to end tonight:

That you were born
and you will die.
That you will sometimes love enough
and sometimes not.
That you will lie
if only to yourself.
That you will get tired.
That you will learn most from the situations
you did not choose.
That there will be some things that move you
more than you can say.
That you will live
that you must be loved.
That you will avoid questions most urgently in need of
your attention.
That you began as the fusion of a sperm and an egg
of two people who once were strangers
and may well still be.
That life isn't fair.

That life is sometimes good
and sometimes better than good.
That life is often not so good.
That life is real
and if you can survive it, well,
survive it well
with love
and art
and meaning given
where meaning's scarce.
That you will learn to live with regret.
That you will learn to live with respect.
That the structures that constrict you
may not be permanently constraining.
That you will probably be okay.
That you must accept change
before you die
but you will die anyway.
So you might as well live
and you might as well love.
You might as well love.
You might as well love.

Amen.