



March 4, 2007
Second Sunday in Lent

Exodus 20:7-11
Ten Signposts to Freedom
II. Living with the Sacred
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Today is the second Sunday in Lent and the second in our series of worship services focused on the Ten Commandments. It is my thesis today that without worship, all of life becomes profane; but, with worship, all of life becomes sacred.

Last week we noted that these commandments were given by God a few months after the Exodus while the people were making their way from slavery to freedom by traveling through a hard wilderness. Thus, the commandments are not only laws but also signposts for the journey through the great wilderness called life. These signposts can still lead anyone to freedom.

Today, I would like to look at the third and fourth commandments: "You shall not take the Lord's name in vain.... Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy."

What does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain? Does it mean that God is so bothered by cursing that he made it third on the list of ten deadly sins? There's probably more to it than that. Does it mean there's something so celestial about God that it is best not to call on him or even to invoke his name lest you contaminate it with your mundane issues? The Hebrews were quite concerned about that. They were so worried about profaning the name of God that they wouldn't even say his revealed name *Yahweh*, but would instead say *Adonai*, which essentially translates as "you know who I'm talking about, but we can't say his name." Do we really profane a holy God by speaking his name in the context of our little problems? Do we bother a God who's busy with the bigger affairs of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East when we peddle our own insignificant needs and worries to him in prayer? Is that what this means? No, of course not.

Actually, what is more typical of us is not that we misuse the name of God, but that we no longer use it at all. We don't seriously invoke God's name when it comes to our needs or the needs of the world. Oh, we may pray about these things sometimes (What can it hurt?), and we probably even believe God could do something. What we doubt is that he will. We think he just doesn't want to get involved. And that is to take the Lord's name in vain.

Remember that according to the first commandment, God's name is "the Lord who brought you out of slavery." This is the Lord who delivered. The Lord God of your salvation. In the Hebrew mentality, the name of an individual proclaimed character. So to take God's name in vain is to ignore his character as the Savior who is very involved. It is for this same reason that Chris-

tians pray “in the name of Jesus.” Every time we call on that name we are claiming that the work of Christ is to save and deliver us.

Anytime you think you can find a little salvation in your own work, you are in grave danger. The danger is this: if you fail, or worse yet, if you succeed for a while, then you’re stuck with yourself for a god. That destines you to the profane existence of journeying through life as if the solution to every problem is to get busy. When you are your own god, life knows no mystery or awe. Nothing amazes, astonishes, or overwhelms you. And that is a small and very sad way to live. It flattens out your soul.

Ironically, to be frantic with busy-ness is a lazy thing. It avoids the hard work of calling upon the Lord’s name and looking for his involvement. To be clear, I’m not saying that Christians shouldn’t work hard. I’m saying that if you’re not praying about your work, you’re not working hard enough. God is involved. That’s his character. It’s in his name. To pray to see his saving involvement is to ask to find a divine importance to your routines of schedules and markets, classes to attend, sales that have to be made, reports that have to be written, floors that have to be cleaned, PTA meetings to be attended, planes to catch, and one more customer to satisfy. If all of that is just stuff you’ve got to do, your life is rather profane. But if through all of it you are looking for the sign of God’s presence, then all of life becomes an opportunity to encounter the Sacred.

So then the question is: how do we see God’s presence in our lives? That is why we were given the fourth signpost to guide us through the wilderness: “Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.”

Does that mean you should go to worship on Sunday? Actually, yes, I think it does. But not for the reason you might assume. Remember that these are signposts to freedom. The fundamental theme of the commandments is not slavish obedience but deliverance and salvation. If you stumbled in here this morning because it’s your duty, well, we’re happy to have you, but you’re missing the point. We don’t worship because we have to. We worship because we get to. This is our chance to see what is going on from heaven’s perspective.

According to the commandment, we are called to the Sabbath rest because God himself rested from his work on this day, not because he was tired, but to enjoy his work and say, “It is good.” This means that creation culminates not in work, not even in God’s work, but in doxology. So worship is our opportunity to see the glorious creativity of all of those ordinary days in-between.

We sometimes say, “On Sunday we go to church,” but this isn’t quite right. You are the church all week long in whatever place you have been sent to work. We come to worship in order to see that God is with us in our work. Some days that’s the only reason we have, and the only reason we need, to echo God in saying, “It is good.” The Sabbath is not your day off from frantically working for your employer so you can be frantic with stuff you have got to do at home. And it is not given so you can catch your breath in order to get back at it on Monday. That all assumes that life culminates in work.

The literal translation of *Sabbath* is *give it a rest, stop, CUT IT OUT!* Worship is God's great interruption of our small arguments with how hard it is at work. We maintain these little arguments about the job that is not fulfilling enough, the supervisor that doesn't appreciate us enough, the salary that is not nearly enough, and the children you can't make perfect. On the Sabbath we hear God say, "Cut it out! Lift up your eyes and see what incredible blessings you have received."

From the beginning, we have been created to live in the rhythm of work for six days and rest on the seventh. All creation from humanity to the animals and even to the dirt of our fields has been created with the need to rest. Again, this is not just to recover strength, but to recover the goodness of life. If you resist this created rhythm of your life, it will not be long before you find yourself enslaved by work. You know this has happened when instead of joining God in saying, "It is good," all you ever seem to say is that it's just not good enough.

The early church changed their day of worship from the seventh day to the first day. Their reason for this was to allow every Sunday to rehearse the joyful surprise of the resurrection. Week after week, year after year, we join the followers of Christ around the world—black followers, white followers, Asian followers, Hispanic followers, followers who meet in Gothic cathedrals, in storefront churches, and persecuted followers who huddle in homes. And all of us make the common affirmation that the Christ who defeated death can also bring new life to you. In the words of the Apostle Paul, "He who has begun a good work in us will bring it to completion." This is why our Sabbath observances always have a note of celebration in them. It is because God is good, and in worship we sing and pray and proclaim our thanksgiving. Only then do we recover the goodness of our own lives.

In 1964, the French philosopher Jean Vanier established a community for mentally and emotionally handicapped people called the l'Arche community, which means "the Ark." Vanier soon discovered that those with developmental disabilities, robbed of all pretense, are able to demonstrate the most essential traits of the human condition common to all of us. For example, he claims humans have to give praise in order to stay healthy. One of the most important things they do in the l'Arche community is celebrate. They celebrate holidays, birthdays, accomplishments, anniversaries, and anything else they can think of. If a week goes by without a celebratory event, they just make up one. Why? Because, as he says, "Suffering is a part of life, and you can never wait until the suffering is over to celebrate."

In worship, we choose to enjoy and celebrate the goodness of God in the life we have.

Benediction: *Wherever life takes you in the ordinary days ahead, the Savior will be waiting to show you the most extraordinary things. But you have to seek to find and enjoy. Amen.*