

“Ten Values That Build Strong Families: Let There Be Life”

Rev. Perry J. Fruhling, St. Mark's Faith & Life Center, June 29, 2008

Grace to you and peace...well so much has changed since the last time I spoke to you three weeks ago today...we talked about the holiness of God's name and how we can use it wrongly or for God's purpose. And then came the rising waters. And we watched as if watching a train wreck, the water rise and destroy so much in our city. And some of you gathered here today either know someone or are ones who have lost possessions, property, businesses, jobs, homes and livelihood. And so we gather here. We're here again TOGETHER to hear a word of hope and renewal. We're here to lean on each other. We're here to grieve and to be strengthened.

It's eye opening to me to see how this week's theme fits the message that we need: "Let there be life." For in a time when we feel like so much has been lost, we need to hear a word from God. A member of our church sent me a devotion this week from author Charles Swindoll: *Suffering pushes us out of our homes. It puts us in touch with our neighbors. Hardship forces us to grab hands with one another and pull up closer together. "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all."* - **Phil 2:17**

She sent another later in the week: *When the sovereign God brings us to nothing, it is to reroute our lives, not to end them. Human perspective says, "Aha, you've lost this, you've lost that. You've caused this, you've caused that. You've ruined this, you've ruined that." But God says, "No. No. It's time to reroute your life. Now's the time to start anew!"*

Well we have certainly been rerouted. There is no doubt that many of our plans have changed during recent weeks and we are having to rethink so much of our daily lives – especially for those directly affected by the disaster, but really for all of us. And I pray that for some of you today, it's a new beginning in how you see God at work in us.

So let's look at today's Word from God and allow it to speak to us in this moment. We're in the 10 Commandments – a series we're calling 10 Values for Strong Families. And maybe today's message is as strong of a word for families that we can have. As I've mentioned before, each of the 10 Commandments carries with it a prohibition – you shall NOT do this. But it also carries a promise – if you keep this commandment, here's how you and your family will be blessed. Let's start with the prohibition on #5 of the Big Ten:

1) You shall not kill/murder.

Job 12:10 says, *"For the life of every living thing is in his hand, and the breath of all humanity."* God is the giver of all life and therefore it is not ours to take. It is when we play God that we begin to take others' lives into our own hands. It's all relative – the larger our position in life, the greater the impact of our playing God.

As I've mentioned before, the first commandment sets a course for each that follows (You shall have no other gods). If I want to be god, I want to destroy life that God gives. In this fifth commandment there are many variations of us playing God with life. Let me describe a number of scenarios to which the fifth commandment speaks – all of them values for our families which are prohibitions meant to protect God's creatures:

- **Hurtful words and insults** – We break the fifth command when we hurt each other with the words we use. It can be anything from yelling to subtle ways we withhold love – it happens in each of our families daily.
- **Abuse comes in forms of physical and emotional** pain and people's lives can be scarred for life because of our hurtful words and actions.
- **Lack of self-care** – We don't need to hold a gun to our heads to commit suicide – we hurt ourselves by the way we treat our bodies.
- **Violence** – Movies, video games simply reflect the imaginations of those who need God's grace. The violence is the unbridled human reaction to the hurt we experience in life.
- **War** – Every general worth his/her stripes knows that the object of our defenses is for the purpose of peace. But we are sinners and live in a broken world. When faced with the options of two evils, is there a good solution?
- **Abortion** – I've met very few people who are Pro-Abortion. We use the words pro-choice, but I doubt that anyone really wants to be faced with that choice. It's a result of the broken world in which we live that we must even debate this issue in our land.
- **Crime** – Any actions taken against another person's physical life from intimidation to murder apply.

Have you ever heard the phrase, "if looks could kill, I'd be dead"? We do kill daily. With the words, the looks, the actions, the apathy, the self-abuse, the thoughts...we fall short of keeping the Fifth Commandment. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:21-22**: *"You have heard that the Law of Moses says, 'Do not murder. If you commit murder, you are subject to judgment.' But I say, if you are angry with someone, you are subject to judgment! If you call someone an idiot, you are in danger of being brought before the high council. And if you curse someone, you are in danger of the fires of hell."* Jesus set a standard for this and each of the commandments that went far beyond the Jewish interpretation of the law. Why?

2) **It's important for us to understand the uses of the law.**

Martin Luther understood that Jesus had not come to destroy the law, but to give it depth and even to fulfill it in himself: *"Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the Law of Moses or the writings of the*

prophets. No, I came to fulfill them. I assure you, until heaven and earth disappear, even the smallest detail of God's law will remain until its purpose is achieved. (Matthew 5:17-18)

Luther understood the Scriptures to use the law in three ways:

- **As a mirror or a measuring stick** to show that we don't measure up
- And thereby **drive us to Christ** for redemption
- A final use was for a **guide for our life**. Luther always was wary of this because of the danger of wanting to earn our way to heaven.

Jesus drives the understanding of the law to such a point that none of us will ever believe that we can keep it. The answer to the question of "what do we do?" is to lean on Jesus Christ for our salvation. You may have spent your whole life not understanding how the Ten Commandments fit into our daily life as Christians. They really serve as a confessional tool for us each day, to help us realize how we have missed the mark, how we have lost our way, served ourselves, played God. When we look in the mirror it doesn't look good – and we realize the only way we can stand before God is by the power of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It is this grace by which we live our life and then can fulfill the promise of the fifth commandment.

In his Small Catechism, Luther writes of the fifth commandment: *We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbor in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.*

- 3) That leads us to the promise of this commandment: **helping our neighbor in all his physical needs**. If the prohibition keeps us from hurting our neighbor... then the promise is that God desires us to help our neighbor physically.

So often we turn a blind eye to our neighbor's needs and **James 2:15-16** addresses this: *Suppose you see a brother or sister who needs food or clothing, and you say, "Well, good-bye and God bless you; stay warm and eat well" – but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?* God calls us to live with an understanding of the need of our neighbor close to us and of the one far off. They may live in Africa, Mexico or in our own backyard. When Jesus lived on earth, he said, "I give you a new commandment, to love one another as I have loved you." And then he laid down his life and he died for us. We now **live out the law of love** according to **James 2:12...**

I'd been spending some time thinking about how to end today's message. But I think I've seen it this week. In the five days that I've spent around the river I saw more than 70 St. Mark's individuals working in the homes and businesses of those whose lives have been torn apart by the flood of 2008. From this church, hundreds have filled and carried sandbags, served water, staffed telephone hotlines, listened to the cries of those in pain, and prayed...I've seen the law of love

in action, the fifth commandment become a promise to those who felt life had been taken away from them.

I've seen Christ in what many thought were God-forsaken places. People ask "where is God in all of this" and I say I've seen the hands and feet of Christ in rubber gloves and boots working beside those who've lost possessions; I've seen him behind the N-95 masks, anonymous as they are living out the love they've received from Christ now sharing it with others; I've seen Christ in those who are carrying out the dirty possessions of those in our community like Christ himself carries away our sinful shame.

Dear friends, you are the final story of today's message. You are the promise that Luther spoke about: helping our neighbor in all his physical needs. We will come through this time together. We are not alone. The hope that is ours will help this city to rebuild and be stronger than it was before. We cannot lose sight of the power and the hope that is ours in Christ.

Dr. David Jeremiah: You see God's faithfulness is not proved by the absence of trouble, tension, calamity, disaster, or personal pain. Indeed His faithfulness is seen most clearly in those times when we question His plan and feel the pain of our circumstances. When we arrive at the place of glorying more in the presence of God's grace to endure our trials, we know that God is growing us to be like Christ who suffered all things for us.

As you view this video and hear the words of "I'll Praise You in the Storm," know that our calling is TO uplift God's name in the storm, to bring hope to our corner of the world, and to proclaim Christ as Lord and King. Amen

(Video YouTube of CR Flood, with music, "Praise You in the Storm")