

Sermon for Christ Church, Spotsylvania, VA  
Third Sunday in Lent, Year B, March 4, 2018  
The Rev. Bill Queen, "The Ten Commandments Christianized"  
Exodus 20:1-17, Matthew 5:21-48

what if there were no speed limits?; think about it for a moment; you could get places faster, be on time more often, and have more fun driving; or, you might possibly get killed by another speeding driver, or kill yourself, or someone else; what if we looked at speed limits from a less personal perspective?; speed limits have some direct benefits: they make driving safer for everybody, they lessen air pollution, and they lessen the waste of a limited natural resource

and they can have some indirect benefits too: while driving the speed limit you don't have to watch for police, so that frees your mind from the worry of getting a ticket; and if you are in an accident, the fact that you were observing the speed limit reduces your being at fault; this freedom from worry and from having to watch the roadsides also frees your mind to observe the beauty of God's creation along the road and in the sky; it gives you unhurried and undistracted time to think, or even to pray while you are driving

now, granted, you might have to do some other things a little differently in your life to go along with the discipline of observing speed limits; you might have to be better organized; you might have to plan your day better so that you can leave in enough time to reach your destination; and possibly by being more organized and by planning more ahead, that might free up even more time to get other things done you've not been finding time for in your life; considering all of these aspects, you might come to see speed limits as a gift that provides benefits to your life

what if there were no Ten Commandments?; think about that for a moment; we could do whatever we wanted and just have more fun; or, would it be more like the failure to observe speed limits, something that could put us and other people in great danger?; the observance of the laws given in the Ten Commandments have the same kinds of direct and indirect benefits that we saw in looking at speed limit laws

in our Exodus reading today we have the giving of the Ten Commandments; now most of us are probably largely observant of most of them: (#1) we don't have any other Gods, (#2) we don't worship idols, (#5) we honor our father and mother, (#6) we haven't committed murder, nor (#7) adultery, nor (#9) given false witness

if we take a close look at ourselves, we might have to admit to having a bit more difficulty with the rest: (#2) taking the Lord's name in vain (what was formerly called 'swearing' now might just be seen as 'emphatically getting your point across'), (#3) keeping Sabbath day holy (we're too busy to be holy for an entire day), (#8) not stealing (what would the IRS find if we were audited?), and (#10) not coveting (the advertising industry and possibly the entire American economy would have to shut down without it)

but notice that the Ten Commandments, as important, and still as challenging as they are, as a set of values, are largely a Jewish statement of values; while they have been subsumed into Christianity, they are not an explicit statement of Christian values; there is a Christianized form of the Ten Commandments, in the *Book of Common Prayer's* Catechism, p.847-8; turn there with me now; you may wonder, what right does the *Book of Common Prayer* have to tamper with Holy Scripture?; well, it is actually doing exactly what Jesus did in Matthew ch 5 in the Sermon on the Mount; you might recall that there Jesus expanded "You shall not murder" into you shall not be "angry with a brother or sister;" he expanded "You shall not commit adultery" into you shall not commit adultery in your heart by looking at someone "with lust;" the Catechism is doing this same kind of Christian expansion of the Ten Commandments; let's read them in unison, one at a time, stopping between each one:

the first set begins with this question and answer: "Q. What is our duty to God? A. Our duty is to believe and trust in God;" (#1) "To love and obey God and to bring others to know him;" that is much more than just not having other Gods, it includes sharing your faith; (#2) "To put nothing in the place of God;" that is much more than just not worshiping idols, it could include money, or another person, or even ourselves; (#3) "To show God respect in thought, word, and deed;" that is much more than just not misusing God's name; (#4) "And to set aside regular times for worship, prayer, and the study of God's ways;" that is much more than just the Sabbath, it is a seven day a week commitment

the second set continues with this question and answer: "Q. What is our duty to our neighbors? A. Our duty to our neighbors is to love them as ourselves, and to do to other people as we wish them to do to us;" I expect you recognize the Golden Rule there; (#5) "To love, honor, and help our parents and family; to honor those in authority, and to meet their just demands;" this is much more than just parents; (#6) "To show respect for the life God has given us; to work and pray for peace; to bear no malice, prejudice, or hatred in our hearts; and to be kind to all the creatures

of God;’ this is much more than just no murder; (#7) “To use all our bodily desires as God intended;” this is much more than just no adultery; (#8) “To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God;” this is much more than just no stealing; (#9) “To speak the truth, and not to mislead others by our silence;” this is much more than just no lying; and (#10) “To resist temptations to envy, greed, and jealousy; to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces; and to do our duty for the love of God, who has called us into fellowship with him;” this again is much more than just no coveting; and notice how these are not just for us as individuals, but call us into the fullness of a relationship with God, with other people, with our true selves, and with God’s created world

I hope you could recognize in each of these expanded statements, that these were not just ideas of the prayer book committee that composed the Catechism, but that every statement is a quote, a near quote, or a paraphrase of something Jesus said or was referenced in a scripture verse

having looked closely at this statement of Christian values, we need to ask ourselves: do we, as Christians, live in such a way as to witness that God’s laws are still important for our lives today?; do we live our lives with explicitly Christian values?; do we really follow these laws, and try to live them out to the fullest?; do we follow them in such a way that they bring discipline to our lives?; do we recognize them as gifts, true gifts from God, that provide great benefits to our lives?