

November 21, 2010
Christ the King Sunday

Deuteronomy 6:1-9
Mark 12:28-34

“Commanded to love”

Command. Obey. I command you to obey me. Obey my commands. OOOOOOPH! How do we feel about those words? Don't they conjure up every smidgen of rebellion that lurks within you? “NO, I WON'T!” almost explodes through our lips, just hearing these words. We picture some sci-fi tale, where a dark-robed hulking figure breathing hoarsely orders his minions to do his bidding. They grovel on the floor before him, weeping and wailing piteously, “Oh, yes, Lord, we will obey you.”

Maybe your imagination isn't as wild as mine. Maybe you just flash back to teachers or parents bossing you around. Whatever the case, we can't hear words like “command”, “obey”, “laws”, without experiencing emotional resistance. Our culture promotes the view that as adults we have a right to live as we want, without interference unless we grossly infringe on the rights of others.

But in the church we have to deal with another perspective entirely. The Bible presents INVITATIONS; to commit our lives to God, to follow Christ, to receive God's grace offered freely. However, in response to those invitations, when we decide to follow Christ and we accept the grace God offer, NOW we are God's PEOPLE. As God's people we've been given COMMANDMENTS. At this point, God is not saying, “I invite you to consider whether or not you want to live in the ways I know are right.” God is saying, “Obey me. Do what I command.”

Churches soft peddle this at times. We know it can turn people off. But, hey, it's just the truth! When we struggle with this, we need to remember that our Lord is no hulking figure cruelly toying with power and relishing our humiliation. Our Lord is One who came to be with us, to experience our temptations and sorrows, to live with them just as we do. Our Lord is One who kneels at our feet to wash them. Our Lord is One who loves us, laughs with us, and wants our lives to be full and abundant. Our Lord is One who lay down his life for us, those of us who are his friends and also for his enemies. It is THIS Lord who now says, “Hear me. And do what I say.”

What does our Lord command? Both the Old and New Testament readings today state this plainly. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, strength, mind and soul.* Jesus adds words from Leviticus, which those following the **Grand Sweep** encountered in an earlier reading: *Love your neighbor as yourself.*

How can God command us to love like this? Love isn't something you can just order people to feel, is it?

Well, friends, we all experience loving feelings at times, but love is a verb. It is something you do, not something you feel. Since it is something we do, we can decide to love. Love is a decision. This means doing things that are respectful, considerate, in the best interests of the other person. Of course, tough love is a reality, too. Sometimes the loving thing to do, that is in the best interests of another person, is NOT what that other person WANTS. So, don't confuse loving with pleasing people and making them happy.

As God's people we decide to love God and others by consciously doing God's will in our everyday actions and speech, moment by moment.

God's will is not just something to consider "in church", or in worship on Sunday mornings. The reading from Deuteronomy makes that clear. We are to be "marinated" in God's command to love. Write it on your hearts.

Talk about God's law of love at home. Do we ever discuss how we are doing with living out God's command to love as we gather for meals in our homes? Do we discuss what God would want, as we face difficult employers, or teachers, or students in our daily lives? Do we even gather for meals at all? Do we MAKE time for conversations like this in our homes?

Teach God's command to love to your children, Scripture tell us. How do we help kids seek God's perspective in situations that arise with friends, personal habits, key decisions they make as they grow and change? Do we ever talk with them about God at all? If so, do we imply that OUR ideas about God are always the RIGHT ones, and that THEIR ideas about God are naïve, uninformed, inferior to ours? Do we teach our children to love God and their neighbors by actually loving God and neighbors ourselves?

Deuteronomy teaches to remember God's commands by having symbols in our homes to catch our eyes as we race around each day. These symbols

should be on our gates and doorways, so when we go out and when we come in we'll remember God and his commands. Do we have anything like that in our homes?

Talk about God's commands when you get up in the morning. The clock is often the topic of conversation in the morning, as its hands or digits march inexorably toward the modern sin of "being late". ***Remember God's commands when you lie down at night.*** Does exhaustion allow any room for even a moment of reflection before falling asleep? ***Remember God's commands as you walk along the road.*** How many of us think about loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength as we drive in today's traffic?

God's word from Deuteronomy is telling us to take God seriously. We are commanded to love God in the midst of homework assignments and parenting, while relating to friends, family, co-workers, store clerks, clients, fellow church members, telephone solicitors, kids on bikes who aren't careful, spouses who don't do what we want, teachers we don't like, brothers or sisters who make fun of us, people who don't listen to us or who always forget what we tell them.

We are commanded to love God and our neighbors when we decide what to do with our money, how to vote, whether to vote, what to write in a letter to the editor, what to say to our children about war and violence, and whether to recycle, or burn the leaves instead of composting.

Obey me! I am your Lord. Do what I command. Love me, for I am your God. Love your neighbors as you love yourselves.

Thank you, God, for these commands. Thank you for your love and power, freely shared with us. It is only YOUR love that makes it possible for us to obey---- your love that loves through us. Amen.