

April 24, 2016
The Fifth Sunday of Easter
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There is one movie that I look forward to seeing every Easter, Cecil B. DeMille's epic classic "The Ten Commandments". Growing up this was a yearly family event involving lots of freshly popped popcorn, iced tea and Kool-Aid. When I was younger, watching this movie was more about seeing Charlton Heston, often shirtless, playing the part of Moses. For those of you wondering, 'Charlton, who?' think Chris Hemsworth and you will get the picture. As I grew up, other parts of the movie began to make an imprint on my brain- one of those being when Moses goes up onto the mountain to talk to God after leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

God appears as a swirling column of fire and in a deep ominous voice says, "I am." Then, fingers of fire fly towards the mountain one at a time as God calls out his commandments, "Thou shalt not kill." Moses averts his eyes as the finger of fire impacts the stone, carving God's Ten Commandments into it. Eight 'thou shalt not's', one honor and one remember later, God frees the two tablets from the side of the mountain.

It wasn't just the cinematic visuals though that left imprints on my brain growing up; it was also the questions that began to evolve as year after year I watched this movie. The first being, 'Why show a movie about the Old Testament around Easter?' Eventually, this started to make sense- the Passover, the blood of the lamb, freedom from bondage- all those things that are found in the Gospel but in a new way. Jesus made all things new- new ways of interacting with God, new ways of being, new commandments.

We no longer have to avert our eyes and avoid looking God directly in the face. Jesus walked and talked daily with the people of the world. He sat at their tables, broke bread with them, looked them in the eyes, and wiped tears from their faces. Jesus showed us that there are no barriers between us and God. He showed us a new way of looking at the world in which we see God in everyone we encounter during our day.

Jesus gave us a new commandment. There was a change from things we 'shalt not do' to one thing we shall do. We shall love. We shall love because when we love others as God loves us, when we love others as ourselves all of those 'shalt not's' become difficult if not impossible to do. When you love someone as yourself, things like murder, lying, and stealing rarely factor into the equation. Christ's command to 'love one another' is very simple, yet complex, and not as easy as it sounds because the type of love that Jesus is talking about doesn't come naturally.

We only have one word in the English language for love and perhaps that is part of why hearing the commandment 'to love' is so confusing. In English we say, "I love you, dear" to our significant other and then when talking to a friend say, "I love chocolate mousse." But we don't mean the same type of love, or at least one hopes not, but it is up to the listener to sort out what that word 'love' really means. Most languages have different words for love to express the different types of love that exist. The ancient Greeks had anywhere from three to seven different words for love depending on who you read but four of those are used most consistently- eros, philia, storge, and agape. Eros is a romantic, fiery type of love. Philia is a friendly, emotionally

connected type of love. Storge is affection between parents and children or between siblings, a familial type of love. Eros, philia, and storge love come naturally.

The last type of love, and the one which Jesus is talking about, is agape love- unconditional love. Agape love doesn't come naturally. It is a deliberate choice and an exercise of our will. It isn't a type of love based on feelings but a love based on action. Agape love is selfless, giving and caring. Agape love is an active love of service and sacrifice that may not directly benefit us but will benefit others. This is the type of love that Jesus calls us to extend to others through our words and our deeds so that world can witness God's love for them. This type of love is hard, but it is worth all the effort we put into it because it changes lives.

When horror or tragedy strikes in whatever form- a bombing, an earthquake, a school shooting, a hungry child reaching out for a scrap of bread, a suicide- and we find ourselves asking, "where is God?" we have only to look around to see God's love in action through those that surround us. Mr. Rogers called it "looking for the helpers". Those people who help us face this darky scary world so that we realize we aren't alone. When we cradle those who are broken in our arms, we are being Christ in the world.

We are Christ to others in the mundane, monotony of the world as well, when we act as a servant to others- rearranging our schedule to meet someone over a cup of coffee, picking weeds from an elderly neighbor's garden, sharing the last ice cream sandwich in the box, acknowledging someone's existence by looking them in the eye and smiling. Simple acts of kindness and agape love that speak volumes, because we are Christ's hands, feet, and eyes in the world.

I will leave you with words from the contemporary hymn "The Servant Song."

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey. We are travelers on the road.
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night time of your fear.
I will hold my hand out to you; speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping. When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven, we shall find such harmony
Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you.
Pray that I might have the grace to let you be my servant, too.

Amen.