

A Sermon for Robbinsdale United Church of Christ
October 5, 2008
By: Rev. T. Michael Rock

Scripture: Exodus 20: 1-4,7-9,12-20 and Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon Title: "The Purpose of the Ten"

(open with prayer)

World Communion Sunday is an amazing event. It was started over forty years ago in the first days of the newly organized World Council of Churches. It was a day that was designed to recognize that which binds our stories together under one God, one Christ, and one table. So, on this day, in the small thatched roof churches of Kenya, the mud hut churches in Haiti, the mountain churches in Mexico, the Quonset hut churches in the green zone of Baghdad, the olive wood churches on the Gaza Strip in Palestine, the house churches in rural China, the cathedrals in Germany, France, and Italy, and the ever-present stone, brick, and white clapboard churches that dot the landscape across these United States, Christians of every language, race, origin are gathering around this table to first taste the law of faith, and then be redeemed by the taste of bread and fruit. This day was designed to ground us in our faith. It was begun in order that we may have some common language to use so that we begin to take on the real issues of poverty, disease, loneliness, and isolation. This day was given to us on our calendar to remind us that we are never meant to worship alone, but that the waters of our baptism connect us to the waters of every baptism, including the one that happened on the shores of the Jordan long ago. Our prayer today is acknowledge that this table is spread far and wide on this day, and that we come here, not to just go through the motions of faith, but to hold the bread in our hands, roll it around and notice the women, men and children all around the world who are connected to us on this day.

The cornerstone has been laid for us that we can, perhaps, build something that honors this connection, but also lays a foundation that is new. With this thought in mind that we are building today, let us receive those ten commandments as if for the first time. Even though we may have heard them a thousand times before, lets hear them as though they are coming from God through a messenger. This time that messenger is a woman healer named Sheryl Fisher. The commandments are given after careful observation. They are not random rules, but corrective measures for us so that we can change the way we have been in the past and, now, can take on something new. These words are meant to change us and help us to move into yet a deeper relationship with God.

SCRIPTURE READING

The first time that Moses comes down from the mountain with these words. The people look around and nod politely and utter all kinds of affirmations about these laws. They are in complete agreement that these are holy and righteous laws and that if only everyone else obeyed them than life would be better. They couldn't wait to get their hands on these laws so they could go and tell their neighbor exactly how THEY were supposed to behave. Laws were for the bad folks, the ones that ran fast and loose with their coveting, slandering, and worshiping God. The first people that received these words, I'm sure thought all about how these words were supposed to keep the trouble makers in line. In the world of prophetic preaching and proclaiming God's will for your life, and preparing us to eat at this wonderfully inclusive table. We call this interpretation "A Historical OOPS - of Biblical proportion". These commandments were not handed down as a banner to be hung or a monument to keep people in line with the powers that be. These commandments were given as a mirror to each individual. These are not for the "bad" people, or for the "unbelievers", these commandments are given to each of us personally. This is about our faith, our walk, our relationship with God. The purpose of the Ten was so that we could walk with God, hand in hand, all the days of our lives. The purpose of the Ten was so that we would not place anything between us and God, not idols, not lies, not time, not possessions, not greed, not hatred, not jealousy, and not even desire. God gives us these commandments, because God wants us to be close. They are not meant to govern societies or nations, they are meant to govern our own hearts and souls. Remember, Christians all over the world are hearing these words this morning, not because we are trying to affirm this Judeo-Christian value, but because we are all lost and all of us need to remember that these are not someone else's commandments, they are given to each us in order that we might come to this table and know that this table is not set for anyone else. This table is set for you and I to eat and drink and taste this holy symbol that we are at the same time, both broken and redeemed. Each us in the meal come with our wounds and sacredness. Everyone around the world comes to the table today, not perfect, but with the potential for perfect love.

That first parable that Sheryl read today is a story of people who live in fear. They are scared, worried and alone. They have heard the commandments, but have rejected them and killed the messenger. They represent the world in which we live, always fearing the ones who are not like us, always worried that someone is coming to take our freedom away. Jesus reminds us that God breaks through our worry and fear and makes for us a new place to build. Our cornerstone is Jesus. He often rejected,

buried, and sometimes even wiped completely away. In a theological sense, this is the state of isolation and loneliness. The good news on this day is that God can never be wiped completely away, when we choose to have faith, build faith, reclaim faith, and renew our faith, the cornerstone is there. The table is set. The path is clear. We feel the power, and know that God only wants us to be together. My desire is for your faith to be strengthened and that each of us will look into the mirror of our lives, take stock of our own isolation and loneliness, and choose on this day with Christians around our world of every hue, tongue and background that today we will walk with our God.

AMEN.