

Pastor Roy's sermon from March 11, 2012

Who are we? How would you identify yourself if someone asked, "Who are you?"

Eugene Petersen tells of a visit with a church member at a nursing home with his young daughter. The member had memory loss and told the same story about herself several times. As they were leaving the home, he explained to his daughter that the woman's mind didn't work as well as it once did. She surprised him with her response, "Oh, I know Daddy; she was just telling us who she was."

What if you had to say in 10-15 single words who you are? What would they be? You might list family relationships, career, organizations to which you, pets, hobbies, personality traits, where you live, what you believe about God and life.

Or what stories might you choose to tell your story? When we choose stories or words, don't we choose those which show ourselves in positive ways, and we naturally emphasize our positive traits to ourselves and to others. But if we're honest we admit that we have shadows, points of our personalities, choices, and behaviors which are not so pleasant. We struggle, we fret, we miss opportunities, we accidentally hurt the ones we love--people, animals, and this planet. But God remains faithfully holding it all.

The Ten Commandments show us who we are without filters. If we so love God and our neighbor, we will be well. If not, we flounder and bring curse rather than blessing. The commandments are a mirror which tell us who we really are rather than who we wish we were.

The first few commandments remind us to **speak of God in terms of amazing goodness and to humbly leave room for the mystery which surrounds God.** God will not be limited by our fears, and thoughts. I believe this is why many claim to be atheist. Perhaps its not that they absolutely do not believe that an amazing power is at work in the universe, it's that they don't like the way people who claim to speak for God live their lives and speak about God as if they possess God.

Speaking for God can easily violate the first couple of commandments. If we have a narrow experience of God and proclaim that to others it will be rejected. In our own insecurity, we are tempted to overcompensate by claiming to know too much about God and how others should come to know God. Besides that, our language is often misunderstood.

These commands, You shall have no other gods before me, you shall not make for yourself an idol, and you shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, are a strong warning to be careful how we speak of God and for God. Not that we should stop speaking of God—absolutely not, but let us be careful that we take the time to listen as well as speak when we bear witness.

In terms of the **Sabbath**, we are not the sum of all of our efforts. As much as we tend to think otherwise, it doesn't all depend on me or you. **We all need to rest and let God's mercy take care of us.** We also need to share one another's burdens. We work best when we work together. [You folks show this so well here at Emmanuel. Scouts leaders and members are also a great example of what can happen when we work together!]

Further down the list of commandments, let us **truly honor and love our parents!** At the monthly Lutheran service yesterday at Messiah Village, one woman shared of her parents and how difficult it

was to raise her and her 3 siblings during World War II. I believe she was from Austria.

The final commandments remind us to be satisfied with what we have and who we are. Nothing which belongs to someone else will make us happy despite all the advertising otherwise. Not cars, or houses, or cell phones, or friends, or spouses. Richness come from within as we enjoy God's perfect mercy and freedom. Isn't it funny how we catch ourselves thinking that someone else or something else will make us happy? And they never do. The only path to freedom is found in walking as God calls forth justice and peace from within us.

Let us not look for life somewhere else! Life is right here if you and I trust! God is with us. God's people surround us with goodness.

Listen to Jesus clearing the temple. What craziness the love and worship of God had become. Rules to follow, and expenses to pay. What insanity! Faith was no longer for the poor but for the rich! Isn't that what it had become in Martin Luther's life too? And how much the case still today!

“Jesus, why are you doing this to our precious temple? **Show us a sign** that this is from God!”

Jesus' sign is for those with eyes, and ears, hands and feet to recognize and commune with God. He says, **“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days!”**

Jesus is saying, **“Stop looking for God everywhere else!** The grace-filled life of God is right here if we only trust. The sign Jesus gives is that he trusts God with his own death. His life is sealed up with God. The need for meeting God in a temple has passed.

Who are you? Who am I? Meditate on the commandments as they invite us to faithfulness. They are a gateway into freedom as we follow the Spirit who offers them for our help. Dwell upon Jesus pointing not to a temple made by hands, but within--to a temple made by God's Spirit. Jesus' story is our story. A quiet mystery at work within. Not excluding our neighbor but welcoming our neighbor with the same joy with which God has welcomed us--in baptism and at the table.

That is the story by which we live. The Spirit of Christ welcomes all to fearlessly follow. Love defines Jesus. May love define us, too, above all else. Thanks be to God. Amen.

We pray for our Bishop Penrose and Israel Peter of the Konde Diocese in Tanzania