

27th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)

Exodus 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20 ; Philippians 3:4b-14; Matthew 21:33-46

Relationship Before Rules

The first reading will be familiar to many of us. We know it as *the Ten Commandments*, though the Bible calls it the *Decalogue*, the “Ten Words”.

Most people think of these ten words as ten rules. But at heart they are about relationship. They invite us to reflect on what it means to live in relationship with God and with one another.

Notice how they begin:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Before there’s a commandment, there’s a reminder. Before God asks anything of the people, they are reminded of who God is and what God has done for them.

These words are spoken to people whom God has chosen, cared for, and set free. God is saying:

“I am your God. I brought you out of slavery. I am leading you into freedom.”

And only then comes the invitation:

“This is how I want you to live in response to my love.”

The Ten Words are often divided into two groups: those about our relationship with God and those about our relationships with other people. But the two belong together.

Our relationship with God shapes the way we live with others. That’s why Jesus summed up the whole law in two great commandments: to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbour as ourselves.

The first relationship gives life to the second.

The first four commandments invite us to keep God at the centre of our lives. Don’t give your heart to lesser gods. Hold God’s name in reverence – treasure God’s name as you would of a person you love. Don’t reduce God to an image you can control – in other words, don’t put God in a box. And remember to rest – take time out to simply “be” – trusting that the world doesn’t depend entirely on you.

The remaining commandments guide our life together. They teach us how to build communities marked by trust, respect, and love. Not lying, not stealing, not exploiting, not treating people as objects to be used.

At heart, it is all about belonging to God.

And so it is for us. We are known, loved, and held by God. We have been called into friendship with God and into community with one another. And that relationship with God needs to remain at the centre of our lives.

I wonder: what has God done for you that might shape how you live in the days ahead?

That question was never far from Paul's mind. Again and again he says, in effect, "This is what God has done for you in Christ; therefore this is how you should live."

In the reading from Philippians, Paul lists his impressive religious credentials. Then he says something remarkable. Compared with knowing Christ, none of it really matters.

For Paul, knowing Christ became the defining reality of his life.

Which raises another question for us:

What sits at the centre of our lives? What is the reality around which everything else falls into place?

For Jesus, it was his relationship with his Father.

Knowing himself loved by God shaped everything he said and did. It gave direction to his ministry, courage for his mission, and, in the end, carried him through the cross and beyond it.

We catch a glimpse of that in today's parable of the tenants.

The owner has done everything possible. He plants the vineyard, protects it, and entrusts it to others. He sends servant after servant, and finally he sends his own son.

The tragedy isn't simply that the tenants break a few rules. The tragedy is that they reject the one the owner loves most.

That is why Jesus quotes the psalm:

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."

The religious leaders realise that Jesus is speaking about them. They have devoted their lives to the things of God, yet they are failing to recognise God's Son standing before them.

And that challenge reaches beyond them to us.

Are we welcoming Christ into every part of our lives? Are we producing the fruits of God's kingdom? Or have other things gradually taken centre stage?

The issue isn't simply whether we keep the rules. The deeper question is whether our lives are centred on Jesus.

For Paul, everything changed when he encountered Christ. What once seemed so important became secondary. The centre shifted from achievement to relationship, from performance to grace, from keeping rules to knowing Christ.

Perhaps that's the question these readings leave with us today: How do we keep relationship at the centre?

The Ten Words begin not with a command but with a reminder:

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the house of slavery."

Before God asks anything of the people, they are reminded of what God has already done for them.

Grace comes before commandment. Relationship comes before rules.

And that's true for us as well. We begin not with what we do for God, but with what God has done for us. We begin with a God who knows us, loves us, calls us by name, and leads us into freedom.

So how will our lives this week show that we belong to God?

How will our words, our choices, our priorities, and our relationships reflect the love we have received? Because, in the end, faith is not about rules. It's about relationship with the God who first loved us, and relationships with others that grow out of that love.

Loving God,
thank you for calling us into relationship with you.
Keep us close to you,
and help us to reflect your love
in all that we do and say.
May our lives this week show that we belong to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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