

Daily Devotions
from the United Reformed Church

The Ten Commandments 1



Monday 5th April Saturday 24th April

The 10 Commandments are at the heart of Jewish and Christian morality; in ages past Christian children would be taught them by rote and many Protestant church buildings had them inscribed on the walls. There is something of a dispute in how they are numbered. The differing Biblical passages about the commandments list 10 but the texts themselves have rather more than 10 direct commandments due to repetition. St Augustine of Hippo divided the commandments up into the order that Catholic and Lutheran churches use now. Thinkers in the Early Church of the East divided them up slightly differently and this division is used by many Orthodox and Protestant Churches. The content is the same, we start and end in the same place but there is some difference. Catholics and Lutherans fold the commandment about graven images into the first commandment and separate out two commandments about covetousness. We aren't following either numbering system slavishly. Sometimes there may be an extra Scriptural passage to help our reflections; each Commandment is given consideration over several days.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| <i>Monday 5th April Belief and worship only of God</i> | <i>2</i> |
| <i>Tuesday 6th April Graven images</i> | <i>4</i> |
| <i>Wednesday 7th April Worship God alone</i> | <i>6</i> |
| <i>Thursday 8th April - The Power of the Name in Jewish thought</i> | <i>7</i> |
| <i>Friday 9th April Not misusing God's name?.....</i> | <i>8</i> |
| <i>Saturday 10th April - Can We take oaths in God's name then?.....</i> | <i>10</i> |
| <i>Sunday 11th April Psalm 38</i> | <i>11</i> |
| <i>Monday 12th April Worshipping together to keep the Sabbath Holy</i> | <i>14</i> |
| <i>Tuesday 13th April The Beauty of Rest.....</i> | <i>16</i> |
| <i>Wednesday 14th April Not Made for the Sabbath.....</i> | <i>17</i> |
| <i>Thursday 15th April How Might We Obey this now?</i> | <i>19</i> |
| <i>Friday 16th April More Honouring of Parents.....</i> | <i>20</i> |
| <i>Saturday 17th April Jesus' Views on Family are Startling</i> | <i>22</i> |
| <i>Sunday 18th April Psalm 39</i> | <i>23</i> |
| <i>Monday 19th April Euthanasia</i> | <i>25</i> |
| <i>Tuesday 20th April Capital Punishment?.....</i> | <i>27</i> |
| <i>Wednesday 21st April War?.....</i> | <i>28</i> |
| <i>Thursday 22nd April Contemporary relationships in the light of this?</i> | <i>29</i> |
| <i>Friday 23rd April What About Divorce?.....</i> | <i>31</i> |
| <i>Saturday 24th April What About Other Forms of relationship?</i> | <i>33</i> |

[Monday 5th April Belief and worship only of God](#)

Michael RJ Topple, Elder, Chappel URC, Essex

Exodus 20: 1 - 4

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water

“alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit.”, today, not yesterday. We continually refresh and renew God’s word in us, interpreting what it means for us today.

Is there a definitive answer to these questions? Perhaps not. Each of us may hold, with conviction, our own opinions. But it’s important that we allow others to thrive in our own ways, love in the way we choose to love, and allow God to evolve our lives.

Prayer

God of all,
Who puts a loving hand on each one of us.
Give us courage to live our lives as you would wish.
Modelled on the life of your son, Jesus.
Give us patience and respect.
Love and kindness to one another.
Send your Holy Spirit,
to guide our thinking and inspire our actions
So that we may become more Christ-like
Day by day. Amen

under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Reflection

‘I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have none other gods but me’...

thus boomed the voice of the vicar in the parish church I used to attend. The words of the Ten Commandments, used at the beginning of every Communion service, were jarring. It was as though, in some way, they always spoke to me.

I’ve often thought this, the first Commandment of the Ten, to be the hardest one.

Most of us, I would suspect, find it fairly easy not to kill people; most of us try our best not to take the Lord’s Name in vain; most of us try to honour our parents... but having other gods before God? That one is a bit trickier.

But surely I don’t have any false gods?
Surely I wouldn’t put anyone/thing in front of God?
Surely not I, the supposedly respectable Christian?

Apart, perhaps, from the football match I choose to attend instead of coming to church;
apart, perhaps, from the kudos I crave among my friends;
or the latest gadget I strive for;
the higher salary I covet;
or the latest position of importance I seek to occupy...

Do you have anything in your life that tries to occupy God’s place? Do

you have anything that seeks to take your priority away from God?

If so, perhaps the first Commandment speaks as much to you as it does to me...?

Prayer

I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have none other gods but Me.
Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these Thy laws in our hearts, we beseech Thee. Amen

(taken from the Order for Communion from the Book of Common Prayer)

Tuesday 6th April [Graven images](#)

The Rev'd Andrew Royal, Minister, Maidstone & Staplehurst URC's

Exodus 20: 1 - 4

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Reflection

'And God spoke all these words'. Do we take it as a 'dibrot' something like an 'utterance' or perhaps even 'inspired speech' or does being 'etched into stone' make it outdated and not relevant for today? Robert Alter describes: 'Writing on stone an archaic medium of communication which lines up with archaic fire (roasting) and archaic baking (unleavened

and the lives of those with whom we interact. Amen

Saturday 24th April [What About Other Forms of relationship?](#)

Dan Morrell, Media for Ministry Consultant and Children's and Youth Outreach Worker, Emmanuel Church Waterthorpe, Sheffield

Exodus 20: 14

You shall not commit adultery.

Reflection

Relationships are complex, here ends the devotion!

Relationships extend far beyond the traditional concept of a) man and woman b) these two people getting married c) these people then living together. Now, only some, or even none, of these may be true about a relationship. Relationships used to follow a logical sequence of: marriage, then moving in together, then sex (probably not all in the same day). It's more common for sex to happen before marriage now, or indeed not with a person one intends to marry. Of course, some will disagree with this practice, common does not necessarily equal correct. Regardless of opinion, sex creates an intimacy and vulnerability that should not be overlooked just because it's happened before marriage, or outside of a committed relationship. Deep levels of trust and communication are required in any case.

On so many different levels, relationships have moved on from their traditional understanding. After all, it was only half a century ago that having homosexual relations was decriminalised in England and Wales, but even then only legal for men the age of over-21 (lesbians were ignored by the law), the age of consent for gay men was only matched with the heterosexual age in 2000. Much more than this has happened, of course, but it just puts into perspective how things have changed. Our own Statement of Nature, Faith and Order states that the Bible is

commitment to sexual fidelity within any marriage that provides legal grounds for dissolving that marriage.

Legalities aside, some Christians believe within their understanding of their faith that nothing can justify the dissolution of a marriage. For such, any form of sexual relationship or intercourse after divorce would necessarily constitute adultery and would be breaking the commandment. One has to respect their integrity.

Other Christians believe within their understanding of their faith that remarriage of an individual after divorce from a spouse who had committed adultery would not necessarily lead to sexual intercourse breaking the commandment. One has to respect their integrity.

Yet other Christians believe within their understanding of their faith that remarriage of an individual after divorce for any reason would not necessarily lead to sexual intercourse breaking the commandment. One has to respect their integrity.

One has to respect the integrity of each understanding because the bounds of God's grace and the directing of the Spirit are truly inexplicable.

Prayer

Caring God, when we interpret Scripture,
may we do so with integrity.

Loving God, when we seek to understand human relationships,
may we do so with respect.

Supportive God, when we are faced with complexity,
help us to cut through the complexity with patience and kindness
so that your deep love shines through
and illuminates our lives

bread) earlier in the story'. Is a card in the post carefully written in your own hand an outdated mode of communication?

During Advent we used the worship song 'Hush there's a Baby'*. Had we been in church, doing the actions would have been easy, but in front of your laptop . . .? How on earth can you do 'Bow right Down' when , in effect, you are trying to touch your toes! (Can you do that? 'Touch your toes? Pre-lockdown maybe but as the pounds go on it might be more of a struggle!)

The 'Bow right Down' was about the magi visiting the Christ Child with precious gifts. Today's text commands us not to bow down to the wrong things. An idol is anything that takes God's place in our lives.

Commentators suggest that these commandments are about naming who we follow. We cannot have two masters. African culture teaches: 'A person cannot choose two roads at the same time' (Mali) while in Cameroon the saying is 'One cannot chase two pigeons at once'. (Do you remember the phrase 'Catch the Pigeon' from Dastardly and Muttley?) The words of this commandment could be translated 'no other God against me' or 'beside me' or 'above me'. During Lockdown I came off my bike spectacularly and found my face slammed against the concrete surface of the pavement. The Commandments were etched in tablets of stone, in your face. God is literally beside us, picks us up and says 'Get back on your bike and keep going'.

*<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1YurJsAVorg>

Prayer

Gracious God, as I bow before you,
whether on my knees or trying to touch my toes,
You are beside me.
You are literally in my face, whether I am comfortable or not.

May I know your continuing presence right in front of me,
guiding and encouraging me.
When I fail and fall
and when I cannot physically
bow right down,
give me the courage to keep on going,
knowing you are beside me. Amen.

[Wednesday 7th April](#) [Worship God alone](#)
Dorothy Courtis, Lay Preacher, Thurso URC

Exodus 20: 1 - 6

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Reflection

The last bit of this reading really doesn't seem fair. Surely God doesn't punish children for the sins of their parents, grandparents, great-grandparents? As Christians surely we don't believe in that kind of damning inherited karma?

Researching family history is a very popular occupation. It's amazing just how far back a researcher can go using old censuses, newspapers, and other written material easily accessed online. And there's the fascination of programmes like 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Celebrities discover ancestors of varying types and react, some with tears, others with pride...

our relationships with each other.

Prayer

God of all relationships, open our hearts to understand and our minds to listen. Fill us with grace to see relationships in human context, more complex than legal boundaries. Give us good judgement and open hearts. Be with all of those whose relationships are or are made to be vulnerable because of betrayal of trust. Restore and heal, make us wise in our choices and loving in our care for others. Amen.

[Friday 23rd April](#) [What About Divorce?](#)

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

Exodus 20: 14

You shall not commit adultery.

Reflection

So what about divorce and adultery? Adultery is the first-stated of the grounds in the law of England and Wales for petitioning for a divorce. Straightforward, and (possibly with a bit of cooperation) easily established or arranged.

But real life is rarely straightforward, and with adultery legally defined as "sexual intercourse with a person of the opposite gender other than a spouse" a number of the possible permutations of extramarital sex don't count on their own as grounds without something else reprehensible in addition.

Maybe that's just a matter of the detail of the law catching up with practice in society so that in all cases it would be the breaking of the

Exodus 20: 14

You shall not commit adultery.

Reflection

I recall my time as a university chaplain when I was in pastoral ministry many years ago. I loved the conversations with students who tested so much with curiosity and creative humour. We had many chats about sex and relationships, with students testing what they believed were the historic mandates of the Church. This was certainly one of them.

Why this commandment is bundled into the Ten is a wonder, making me think, like other Laws in the Torah, that it was designed to protect people. Keeping clean at certain times, not eating some foods, observing certain behaviours were far more about keeping humans safe than they were about honouring God. What would adultery have damaged – a lineage? Access to inheritance? Pride? Whatever it was then, the commandment has become weaponised in the move from then to now. Adultery is criminal still in many countries, with stoning, particularly to women, being done in the times we read this reflection. It is an agreed reason for divorce. I speculate anew. Why is it a problem to be made a crime? What is damaged? Why is it written this way around rather than You shall honour your relationship?

I often spoke in student conversations about sexual relationships as ultimate vulnerability. To expose one to another in profound intimacy is not a light-hearted thing, but a deep, personal, trusted thing, sealing a relationship in a singular way. Adultery reveals things about trust and expectations, about aspiration and greed. It speaks of prior decisions made well or badly, painful relationships escaped, hope for a new relationship to work. It is not neat or easily explained, and, I believe, not criminal. Adultery. Mostly, it's human. God's part is in holding and loving us as we struggle to love God and as we struggle deeply to honour

We each have a backstory and some of us will have a backstory of folk who were more sinners than saints, folk who may indeed have rejected God. But that does not force us to reject God in our own turn. Their influence down the ages might have been less than helpful, a punishment in itself, but we each have our choice of the way we will take - and as a result, the influence our lives and choices will have on the generations that come after us.

I cling to a belief in a God of new beginnings, the one who not only has an ever-open door but comes running out to embrace us at the first sight of a step back towards him.

Prayer

Open our eyes to our responsibilities to the generations that will follow us - both physically in terms of our responsibility for the environment we hand on to them, but also spiritually, that they might enjoy the loving relationship with God that he so desires, through his son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Thursday 8th April - The Power of the Name in Jewish thought](#)
The Rev'd Bachelard Kaze , Minister, Eastwood & Marlpool URC

Exodus 20: 7

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Reflection

What is your favourite name or title for the Triune God and why? Usually, names say something about who and how people are. There are about 80 different names for God in the Bible, mostly in the Old Testament. Each name depicts a specific attribute and essence of God. God appears

to be more like a verb than a noun. God's names often refer to what God has done and what God can do. So, God's names can be strongly connected to the times, situations and settings, when they are used. The prime name of God is YHWH, an expression of the eternal and unutterable character of God. Today, many people use God's name in situations of shock, surprise and overwhelming: somewhat calling God into their situation in a consumerist and irreverent manner. Other people use God to make promises, many of which are not only lazy and cunning but also alien to God's will. The biggest issue to me is when one uses God's name for personal gain or fame. God's name has been misused and misappropriated since the creation. In Acts 19.13, the seven sons of a Jewish High priest named Sceva, tried to use Jesus' name to cast out evil spirits, like Paul did. Yet, they end up being mauled by those spirits. They did not know that Paul used Jesus' powerful name out of an active relationship, intimacy, submission, reverence and cooperation. More than just a noun, God's name may be used like an incarnate verb in praise, selfless-service, prayer, petition and thanksgiving. We could do so, expecting God's attributes to be embodied around us, for the expression and growth of the Kingdom. 'God' is like a relational, powerful and incarnate verb. If ever used, then to God alone be the glory.

Prayer

El Shaddai, You are almighty and sovereign
Adonai, at Your name every knee bow in heaven and on earth.
Elohim, thank you for making us wonderfully in Your image
El Roi, thank you for saving us
Jehovah Jireh, we lay our needs and longings at Your feet
Jehovah Rohi, be our shepherd in this pandemic wilderness
Jehovah Shalom, grant us peace, passing all understanding
Emmanuel, be in our waking, working and resting. Amen

Friday 9th April Not misusing God's name?

The Rev'd Mike Walsh, SCM Pioneer Minister, Chorlton, Manchester

and many of our number either have or are still serving in the military. Military service during war or peace time does not equate to being bloodthirsty or careless of human life.

Personally, I cannot foresee any circumstances in which I would be willing to take the life of another human being, made in the image of God, although some would be willing to do that in certain circumstances.

What of Exodus 20:13? Does "murder" cover warfare? My Theological Dictionary tells me that the root of the Hebrew word that we translate as "murder" has a deeper and broader base beyond pre-meditated crime. The religious Law provided for vengeance killings (quasi-judicial execution?) Dig deeper and we see that it is the shedding of innocent blood that is most strictly forbidden. Is an enemy during war innocent? History shows that many are pressed (by legislation or by peers) into service during times of war. Their acts may become less "innocent," but they may not have entered warfare for ideological reasons. Anyone drawn into war will have to wrestle with this.

As for me, and I hope my house, serving the Lord precludes me "joining up" to fight wars.

Prayer

Loving God,
Jesus taught us to love our enemies and to turn the other cheek.
Is it more loving to kill to protect another, or a nation's way of life, or to see the image of God, in my "enemy" and risk my own life?
We pray for all facing this dilemma or daily choice.
Bless them with your Holy Spirit to guide and protect them and lead them to make wise choices.
Amen.

Thursday 22nd April [Contemporary relationships in the light of this?](#)
The Revd Elizabeth Gray-King, URC Education & Learning Programme Officer, member St Columba's URC Oxford

cheek, let them hit the other cheek too.”

Capital punishment is never a justice response. And God always wants us to act justly and love mercy.

Prayer

He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Lord, give us the strength, compassion, mercy and understanding to be just and kind on our journey with you.

[Wednesday 21st April War?](#)

The Rev'd Steve Faber, Synod Moderator, West Midlands Synod

Exodus 20: 13

You shall not murder

Reflection

The Hebrew for Sixth Commandment consists of two words, usually translated, “You shall not murder.” Can we build a doctrine against war (or determine that this commandment doesn’t apply to state-prosecuted warfare) on the basis of these two words? Short answer: no; not on any single verse.

There is – and perhaps always will be – a difference of opinion around pacifism within the United Reformed Church but there is certainly a long tradition of this conviction being held by our members.

Equally, we have URC Ministers serving as chaplains in the armed forces,

Exodus 20: 7

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Reflection

Ministering as a Pioneer, working mainly with young adults in cafes and bars in South Manchester I hear the words ‘Jesus Christ’ quite regularly ... often followed by an apology!

Exclaiming the name of Jesus as an expression of shock or surprise, disappointment or frustration, anger or ecstasy is a common thing in our society, and although I doubt any of those who apologise for the language used when in the company of a minister are directly concerned about Exodus Chapter 20 verse 7, it is from this verse where the idea of ‘using the Lord’s name in vain’ arises.

Amongst those reading our Daily Devotions I suspect feelings will be diverse as to whether hearing the name of Jesus used in this way is offensive, uncomfortable, or of little concern. Whatever your personal feelings, I would suggest that in our engagement with others perhaps different from ourselves it is always better to listen carefully to what is being expressed, rather than the language used to express it.

All that said, to reduce this verse to concerns about swearing is to lose sight of much more troublesome behaviours which this commandment is much more likely to be warning us against, regarding swearing an oath, rather than swearing as bad language.

Reformed voices of the past have interpreted this verse to be a warning against several different ways of making commitments in God’s name, but failing to fulfil them, knowingly or not.

Whether we ourselves would 'swear to God' as if to guarantee our claims, perhaps this verse can serve as a reminder to all of us to avoid making promises to God and others with little sincerity; of making promises in haste with little regard for the difficulty of the task; of protesting our innocence when we know ourselves to be guilty, or swearing what we say is true, when we know it to be false.

Prayer

God, whose name is holy
and can inspire the best in us,
we acknowledge the ways in which we can hide our frailty
behind your name.
When we speak the name of God,
May it be to share our wonder of you and your love for us
in a world in little need of false promises,
but yearning to know what is good and true. Amen.

[Saturday 10th April - Can We take oaths in God's name then?](#)

The Revd Fiona Thomas, freelance facilitator, member of Christ Church, Bellingham.

Exodus 20: 7

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Reflection

In January President Biden and Vice-President Harris took oaths of office ending "so help me God". Both also rested a hand on chosen Bibles to underscore the solemnity of their oaths. This is a tradition, despite the strict separation of State and Church in the USA.

In Exodus the people were warned against wrongful use of God's name, not against using God's name at all. ~~So~~ when could they call on God's

And care for each other as well as those in their care

In the name of Jesus the healer

Amen

[Tuesday 20th April Capital Punishment?](#)

Leo Roberts, Children and Youth Development Officer, North Western Synod

Exodus 20: 13

You shall not murder

Reflection

At the time of writing the United Kingdom does not accept capital punishment as a punishment for crime. And how worrying it is that the sentence starts "At the time of writing"... As we look around the world at countries that allow capital punishment a few things become clear - the taking of someone's life as a legal response to a crime (irrespective of how heinous that crime may be) is almost always more about revenge than justice.

As Sister Helen Prejean says "The death penalty is fundamentally a poor person's issue. Over nearly 40 years of visiting death row facilities across the United States, I have never met a single person with money or resources. Capital punishment means "those without the capital get the punishment."

Capital punishment is often justified by the quote "An eye for an eye" but that is always taken out of context. The full quotation, from the Gospel of Matthew (5:38-39) is "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you, don't fight back against someone who wants to do harm to ~~you~~ you. If they hit you on the right

by maintaining artificial nutrition and hydration. In some countries, people can receive medical treatment to end their own lives, still a future debate for the UK. All these require ethical decision-making as a central part of care in many settings: acute medicine, cancer care, neonatal care, and now covid-19 where choices may need to be made about prioritisation of limited resources, withdrawing or withholding treatment.

These are emotional, difficult issues, often without clear answers. In the 1970s it could be accepted that death was inevitable in a very sick patient, or that a baby with serious congenital disorders would not survive. Today because of treatment advances there are more options and so more complex decisions to be made between healthcare staff, patients and families. Withdrawing food and fluid can be seen as a means of ending life in someone who could have survived: but continuing these can prevent moving to palliative end-of-life care. The hospice movement has done much to address these issues and improve care of the dying. Seeing someone die with dignity and at peace, without pain, is a marked contrast to seeing a failed resuscitation attempt in an older, frail person.

In reality, a balance is needed to enable decision-making that is ethical, moral and common-sense. Everyone matters equally, but this does not mean everyone will be treated the same. Everyone has a right to compassionate care, whether living or dying. Let's hold before God today those working in healthcare who face daily ethical decisions.

Prayer

Lord God

We thank you for all who work in health care
May they be compassionate at all times
Able to express complex issues in ways that people can understand
Support people in making difficult decisions

name and God's power, for the name of God is powerful? Disclosed to Moses in Exodus 3.13-20 as "I AM" or alternatively interpreted as "I will be what I will be" the name shows that God's freedom could not be constrained. God chooses to be present in the name and trusts fallible human beings to use it rightly. God's name was to be used by Israel alone, for blessings, solemn undertakings and, sometimes, overcoming enemies. Improper use would be in lying, bearing false witness, or trying to bind God to human purposes. Breaking the duties of a promise taken under oath invoked divine punishment. "So help me God – you can punish me if I fail." How many violent intentions have been carried out to their conclusion because of a promise made in fear of God?

The early Church was clear on the point of not using God's name for oaths. Matthew 5. 33-37 and James 5.12 state "let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No' be no": integrity as a Christian and as a human being was enough, without bringing God overtly into the matter. The divine was already present in a life lived in reliance on God.

So when encountering systems of justice Christians should perhaps choose to "solemnly, sincerely and truly declare and affirm" the truth of their testimony rather than swearing by Almighty God.

Prayer

God who is and will be,
source of truth,
expression of complete integrity,
give us the courage to face whatever must be endured
relying on you
so that your name will be known
whether we use it or not.
Amen

[Sunday 11th April Psalm 38](#)

The Rev'd David Coaker serves with Grays URC in Essex.

1 Rebuke me not in anger, Lord:
restrain your wrath, I pray;
grant that your child
be yet restored,
not judged and cast away.
I feel your arrows deep within,
I sink beneath your hand
and underneath a weight of sin
too great for me to stand.

2 For sinful folly now I pay:
I'm humbled to the ground,
as I go mourning all the day
and no relief is found.
I feel my body racked with pain,
diseased in every part,
so crushed that I cannot contain
the groanings of my heart.

5 My foes are many and are strong, their hatred has no cause;
my kindness they repay with wrong, although I keep your laws.
O Lord, be with me to the last, remain for ever near;
come to my rescue, come with haste: O Lord, my Saviour, hear!

David G Preston (born 1939) from Psalm 38
This works well to Kingsfold which you can hear here
<https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/199009>

Reflection

3 My longings, Lord,
to you are known,
you see my every tear;
my strength, my sight
are almost gone,
my friends will not come near.
And others lay their deadly snares,
all day they plot and lie;
like one who neither
speaks nor hears, I offer no reply.

4 In you, O Lord, my hope I place:
Lord, answer when I call;
let those not jeer at my distress,
who long to see me fall.
My foothold is about to go,
my torment will not cease;
and my iniquity I know:
my sin permits no peace.

of others is not diminished, but named and held and healed through all encompassing love.

In such a relationship with God, the Psalmist prays for joy not tears....let us pray

Prayer

Gracious God,
source of life and hope and joy
we turn to you when times are strange
and we feel the uncertainties of life.
Renew in us your gift of hope through Christ
Guide us as we 'walk the way, living the life of Jesus today'
When we hurt, heal us from all that harms us
and enable us to sense your love and peace
so that we may live joyfully and abundantly with you. Amen.

[Monday 19th April Euthanasia](#)

Ruth Tompsett is an elder at Newport Pagnell URC

Exodus 20: 13

You shall not kill (KJV)

Reflection

'...but need not strive officiously to keep alive'. An ethical principle of my nurse training along with 'do no harm'. Googling today, I learned that rather than an established medical dictum, it is from satirical verses on the 10 Commandments by Arthur Hugh Clough, 1862.

Medical ethics have changed in my 40 years' nursing as new treatments evolved. People routinely survive diseases that were once certain killers. Tiny premature babies can be cared for and thrive. Life can be prolonged

until at last to you I turn. and not to spurn my cry to you;
4: A stranger in the midst of life, but let me find instead of tears,
a rootless traveller passing through, sufficient joys for all my years.
I ask you Lord to hear my prayer,

Martin Leckebusch © 2006 Kevin Mayhew Ltd
You can hear the tune for this Psalm here
<https://hymnary.org/media/fetch/155141>

Reflection

I find myself in a strange situation. Months of restrictions and lockdown have meant many of the usual rhythms and routines of life have disappeared for over a year, and while on the one hand time feels like it is moving more slowly with decreased activity, on the other it continues to move at pace with it hardly seeming possible that we have been living with the global coronavirus pandemic for over a year.

The Psalmist seems to know something of that feeling too, caught in the fast pace of time, yet feeling they have nothing to show for it, their efforts in life pointless and futile. Perhaps this is also our experience as we have had to make changes to patterns of living; in the ways we work, volunteer, be neighbourly, worship, socialise?

In response the Psalmist turns to God. It is in God that they find hope; that they find their guidance for living; that they are lifted beyond their pain and experience the loving touch of the Creator.

Perhaps this may also be our response for these strange days? God is the one who offers us hope; for ourselves and for the world; who offers us a renewed vision of what the world may be like if we are bold enough to live and proclaim it so that others catch the vision too. Through the Word of God we find our guidance for living this vision - loving God and each other, being people of peace, pursuers of justice and sensitive stewards of the earth and in God's presence the pain of our experience, and those

The writer is recalling a time that they felt completely isolated, both from God and from other people. There is no assurance of, or thanksgiving for, healing. It doesn't seem to fit in with a religious ceremony. It is a lament, a Psalm with an "alphabetic" structure (has the same number of verses as the number of letters in the alphabet) and was probably used for personal devotion.

Whilst I can understand the feelings that gave rise to the words, I cannot take them literally:

Holy God, I beg for mercy. I feel completely alone. I try to centre myself on you and all I sense is absence, and that leaves my heart and spirit broken. Feeling separated from you is like an arrow in my side, my strength has gone, and dark clouds fill my horizon.

Why? What have I done for this to be my fate? Reveal to me what I should do! Help me!

My circle of family, friends and neighbours, all those closest to me, step back lest they fall into the pit I am in. They fear saying the wrong thing, making matters worse, or risking the balance of their own fragile lives. I imagine all kinds of traps being set for me as I sink deeper. I can hear no consolation. I can speak no words of kindness. O God I need your presence, and to hear your Word.

Why would anyone relish my discomfort? I feel the abyss before me. My sorrow is overwhelming. I believe I am worthless. Forgive me!

I think that everyone is against me. I see anger and hostility all around me. I try my best, but no-one considers me worth their effort.
Holy God, have mercy. Draw close to me. Hurry to my side. Save me, O God.

Prayer

Thank God for the NHS!

Thank God for our forebears and peers who by trial and error, theory and experiment, modelling and recommendation, revealed, explored, and affected our health, well-being, and lives. Even though they at times faced ridicule, persecution or were overlooked, they continued in their endeavours trusting that Creation was comprehensible, consistent, and creative.

Thank God for the invitation to be co-creators, custodians, and observers of Creation. Amen.

[Monday 12th April](#) [Worshipping together to keep the Sabbath Holy](#)
The Rev'd Fiona Bennett minister Augustine United Church, Edinburgh

Exodus 20: 8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Reflection

In the Wilderness where this story is set, the Hebrew People were cut off from many of the habits, routines and opportunities which had shaped them in Egypt. The 10 Commandments were a covenant to forge a renewed society, a society unlike Egypt, which was built of healthy relationships between God and the Hebrew People, the People with each other, and the People with the world at large.

The Sabbath commandment in Exodus, implies a rhythm built into the very fabric of creation which includes a pattern to set aside time to focus

So how do we make sense of what Jesus would have us do in relation to honouring our fathers and mothers? Perhaps the key is in honouring our ultimate Father and Mother, the true source of our being, and not letting any other claim, even that most legitimate of our duty to those with whom, through biology and relationship, we have mutual dependency and responsibility, come first. Seek first the kingdom, then live like kingdom people and show love to all, however easy or difficult those relationships might be.

Prayer

Jesus – it is so hard to keep the most important thing in focus. Help us live up to being called your brothers and sisters. Help us be faithful children of God, giving honour where it is due. Help us in all our family and wider relationships, particularly at this challenging time, to share your love and honour one another in the stresses and strains of everyday life. Amen.

[Sunday 18th April](#) [Psalm 39](#)

The Rev'd Lindsey Sanderson, Minister, East Kilbride and Hamilton Joint Pastorate.

Lord show me how

to count my days,
for life is like a single breath:
so swift the passing of the years,
so brief the course
from birth to death;
and all my labour seems in vain,
however great the wealth I gain.

3: But why should those who scorn
your name,
derive enjoyment from my fear?

2: I have no hope, except in you,
so show me mercy for my sin;
let not my heart be overwhelmed
as I receive your discipline.
In hushed and holy awe I stand;
I feel my pain, I sense your hand.

I keep my feelings to myself
whenever godless ears are near;
yet how the fires within me burn,

necessary.

In all circumstances, may Your grace come alongside us,
Helping us to rediscover the lost story of the family. Amen

Saturday 17th April Jesus' Views on Family are Startling

Dr Sam Richards, serving as Head of Children's and Youth Work ,member of mayBe Community, Oxford.

Exodus 20: 12

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Reflection

Honour your father and mother – what would Jesus do? Well we know that as a twelve year old he felt no need to put them ahead of his desire to hang out in the Temple 'Child, why have you treated us like this?' asks his less-than-honoured mother (Luke 2:48). Later he refuses to respond to his family's concerns, asking 'Who is my mother?' (Matthew 12:48). Yet at the hour of his death on the Cross he asks his best friend to take on his responsibilities as a son to his mother: 'Woman, here is your son' (John 19:26).

Jesus provocatively declares he has not come to bring peace but a sword: 'For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother' (Matthew 10: 34). Nothing warm and fuzzy here, nor in this call to follow wholeheartedly: 'Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26). Extreme language to describe family relationships, about as far as you could get from expressing honour. And yet Jesus lays into the Pharisees and scribes for breaking the fifth commandment – saying you are giving God what might otherwise have been due to your parents 'makes void the word of God' and demonstrates how far hearts are from God (Matthew 15:3-9).

on God. While I understand that every moment of life is an opportunity to encounter holiness, this commandment suggests a fundamental human need (like our need for exercise or healthy food) to make time to keep our perception of holiness ever growing and open. Moving with the Sabbath Rhythm enables us to be continually refreshed in maintaining those healthy relationships with the Holy One, each other, the world at large, and perhaps even with ourselves. For many people that fundamental need to keep our perception ever growing and open, includes being with others for worship, growth and support.

The period of the Covid 19 Pandemic has been a wilderness space where we have been cut off from habits, routines and opportunities which have shaped our lives and society. For many, setting aside time to come together to focus on God has been challenging and we have had to forge new habits, routines and opportunities which previously were laid out for us. Having now lived with these ever-adapting restrictions for over a year, it is perhaps a good time to reflect on the new patterns we have developed and to notice what in these new habits has been effective and what less so? Which of our new routines might we want to continue into a post Pandemic world? How have these new opportunities to focus on God refreshed us and equipped us to develop and sustain healthy relationships with God, each other, the world and ourselves? How has this Pandemic wilderness revealed to us new ways of moving with the Sabbath Rhythm to keep our perception ever growing and open to the God who holds us in a Covenant of love today?

Prayer

Holy One, Thank you for your Covenant of love which has held us through times of sorrow and joy.

Thank you for your Sabbath Rhythm beckoning us deeper into wholeness.

Grant us the wisdom and energy to seek regular refreshment, so that our relationships with you, with others, with ourselves and with the earth,

may offer a taste of your Realm. Amen

Tuesday 13th April The Beauty of Rest

The Rev'd Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries

Exodus 20: 8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Reflection

Sometimes the most urgent and vital thing you can do is take a complete rest. Hard for some of us though. Yet a regular time of rest is there in the opening chapters in Genesis. After working for six 'days', God establishes a pattern of resting on the 7th building a rhythm into the DNA of creation.

All Ancient Near Eastern cultures held customs of keeping rest days. But for the Israelites, sabbath rest took on special meaning not because of its regularity or various prohibitions, but in the fact that the day is made holy because of its relationship to God: God stopped, then he was able to make a covenant with his people.

In Exodus, God calls his people to observe not just remember the sabbath: a day for everyone and not just for one day a week: every seven years, land is rested ... debts are forgiven... slaves go free...Sabbath, then, is about an entire way of life. If you don't learn how to rest well, you will never learn how to work well (and vice versa). Work and rest (not sleep) live in symbiotic relationship.

Exodus 20: 12

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Reflection

A number of years ago I heard the story of a family who had to arrange for the burial of their abusive father. Understandably, they struggled to find words for the gravestone which could be described as honourable.

How do we show honour to our parents in the modern era? Many of us do not live in honour cultures and, instead, might subscribe to the notion that honour and respect have to be earned. Coming from a broken family myself, I would often describe today's scripture as aspirational rather than the reality.

Or maybe we should regard this as a lost story. Once upon a time, for many, this was (and still is) the reality. Parents can be honoured. But we are all too aware of the consequences of broken parental relationships, and families put under pressure through poverty, social policy and other such circumstances. Instead, this could be a story which we seek to re-discover and re-invest in. Hopefully, when family life is well, we, the children of those families are well too.

Prayer

Holy Trinity, in whom the most honourable expression of parenthood and family is expressed,

We offer thanksgiving in unease and discomfort.

We thank you for those families which encompass the sentiment of today's reading.

We mourn with those families which have experienced distress;

We pray for healing, forgiveness where possible, and protection where

In UK society today, we often think of our mother and father in terms of the nuclear family and in relation to this commandment, either dismiss it or angst over it. If we understand honouring our parents to mean submitting to behaviours and perceptions which are destructive or diminishing of human worth, I believe we are entirely missing the purpose of this commandment which is about supporting a society which protects.

How does it affect us to think of honouring our mother and father not just as 2 individuals but representing the wider, longer and diverse heritages, cultures and communities to which we belong? What could it mean for our world if we respected our diverse heritage and through it sought to build communities in which everyone belonged and was protected? I believe doing this may draw us in the direction of why this commandment was given to people wandering in the wilderness nearly 3000 years ago.

Prayer

Holy One, Jesus showed us that each life is precious, valuable and interconnected.

May remembering our heritage deepen our humanity and lead us to build your Realm on earth through relationships which respect, include and protect all. In the name of Jesus. Amen

[Friday 16th April More Honouring of Parents](#)

The Rev'd Daniel Harris, Minister with the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership 20

Sabbath is not a day off to do housework or go to Ikea. Sabbath (shabbat) means 'stop', 'cease', 'be complete'. It needs to be held alongside another word for rest (nuakh), a time to be restfully present in God's presence. God calls us back into this rhythm of grace from the busyness of our digital lives, to reflect on the work of the last six days, and just enjoy. Jews have been practising Sabbath for millenia. They talk about 'menuha' (another word for 'rest') often translated as happiness or delight. As you keep the Sabbath, delight in the life you have in partnership with God, delight in the world around you, and delight in God himself. That is what the Sabbath is for. Such is the beauty of rest.

Prayer/Meditation

Be still and know that I am God...

Be still and know...

Be still...

Be...

Amen

[Wednesday 14th April Not Made for the Sabbath](#)

The Rev'd William Young, Pastor, Covenant Baptist United Church of Christ, Washington DC

Exodus 20: 8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all

that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Reflection

This is the first of three major moments in the Torah where the law to keep Sabbath is asserted, and each time there is a different meaning attached to its importance. In Exodus, keeping Sabbath is a reminder of creation: God rested after the creation of the universe, likewise for us. In Deuteronomy, their liberation from Egyptian slavery is referenced. Between the two stands the detailed legal account in Leviticus 23, with the explanation that it is to be a holy occasion and a sign for the generations after them.

The late Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explained that these three moments explain the three major elements of religion: creation (God's relationship to the world), revelation (God's relationship to us), and redemption (the union of God's will and ours).

So, keeping Sabbath is not supplementary. Yet, nearly two millennia later, Jesus places his own interpretation of Sabbath for a generation for which Sabbath keeping has lost meaning: Sabbath is made for us, we are not made for the Sabbath. Meaning, far from it being an 'obligation' or imposition, it is supposed to be a source of liberation, connection and transformation.

We hardly consider Sabbath in this way. We are caught up in what Walter Breuggemann calls "a culture of restlessness." Before the pandemic, weekly worship was side-lined by football matches and sleeping in on Sunday. These days, in streaming worship, I must remind the virtual congregation of rules of etiquette; like keeping the audio on mute, etc. Surprisingly, it is more difficult for us to offer space to God in our own homes than it is in a sanctuary. We seek experiences of worship that allows us to stay just the way we are, and at our peril, that maintains predictability even as the world around us is changing.

To 'keep Sabbath' is to be mindful of the sacredness of time, that time itself belongs to God and is for our benefit.

Prayer/ Meditation

Neither a vacation or a heavy load;
Time with You is a joy and a treasure.
May the busyness and burden of life
Never separate us from the holiness of rest
and the wholeness of Divine kinship. Amen.

[Thursday 15th April](#) [How Might We Obey this now?](#)

The Rev'd Fiona Bennett, minister, Augustine United Church Edinburgh

Exodus 20: 12

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Reflection

The 10 Commandments were offered to people in the Wilderness between escape from Egypt and being settled in the Promised Land. This sets the story in the Ancient Near East somewhere around 1200 BCE. The infrastructure of society at that time was based around tribal family. If people found themselves in need, it was to the broad tribal family they turned. It was the tribal family structure which protected the vulnerable and maintained order. It was the strength of the tribal family as a whole which enabled survival into "long days". To honour the structure was to respect it, uphold it and enable everyone to survive. To honour the structure was to know where you came from and where you belonged. Of course, this will have worked well for some and less well so for others, and evolved and changed over time.