

Exodus 20:1-2, 17  
October 5, 2008

South Plains  
World Communion

### What Holds Us Together?

When I first started thinking about this sermon for World Communion Sunday, the questions in my mind were familiar: How do we connect our Christian life in Keswick with the life of Christians in Singapore, Sudan and Sarajevo? How can we talk about the ties that bind Christian churches together across the barriers of politics, language, ethnicity, and economics? In the meantime, the stock market began to drop, banks began to close and people started losing their homes to foreclosure. Today, we are confronted by overwhelming evidence that the nations and peoples of the world are tied together in a worldwide economy. The Japanese who make Toyotas are not selling as many cars because Americans can't buy them. Politicians are talking about a worldwide recession.

So the question for this sermon is different today:

Is there anything that holds us together as powerfully as a global economy? Christians want to say, Yes! Our faith in Christ holds us together, and we believe that. World Communion Sunday reminds us of our unity in Christ. In uncertain times when we may be tempted to think our world is falling apart, it's important to remember exactly how God has held us together over the centuries.

The story of the exodus is a story of people in hard economic times without the stability of a homeland. They were people in search of a home, chasing a dream that was rooted in a promise made by a God they did not know very well. When we pick up their story in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, we find them literally and figuratively in the wilderness, sometimes hungry, other times without water, and always so tired that they wonder whether slavery in Egypt might be preferable to this long journey.

At this point, the Lord gives them a gift, ten commandments designed to make life together possible, and possibly good. It's a pretty simple law, so simple that it's called the ten words. These ten words create a fence, marking the boundaries of a good life. Live within this fence, and you will be blessed. Cross the boundary line, and you can expect trouble. That's why most of the commandments are negative. Inside the fence is freedom. Venture outside the fence and you will run into broken families and unlivable communities, violence and distrust.

But, this is more than a set of rules, more than a recipe for the good life. Rules are helpful, but they are not enough by themselves. Most of us resent rules imposed on us from outside, especially when they are dropped, as it were, from the sky without some explanation, written inflexibly in stone. That's the way many people today see the Ten Commandments, and that is why many people ignore them.

It is salvation in Christ. These commandments are part of the package of salvation. They are part of the glue that holds us together, not only for good fellowship, but for the good life. They are the law that Jesus Christ fulfills in his life. He gives that fulfillment to us as the gift of grace.

Fast forward to the last commandment: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife; or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” It’s the one commandment that zeroes in on an attitude, a state of mind. For that reason, it’s the one we overlook. Because it commands the heart, it may be the most Christian of the Ten.

When we covet something, we want what is not our own; and we dwell on that desire to the point where it becomes unhealthy. We indulge in discontent. We express a deep dissatisfaction with the life we have been given. Covetousness is not simply wanting what we don’t have. It begins to organize our thinking and eventually our life around an illegitimate desire. The result? We lie, steal, we commit adultery or murder in order to get what we want. Coveting is the weed we need to pull up before it takes over our whole garden. A lot of people are blaming covetousness for the problems of Wall Street.

It has been said that greed is the great engine of capitalism. I don’t believe that. But when greed takes over, when people are motivated primarily by the desire

When we look at how the Ten Commandments begin and how they end, I believe we can see them as much more than a set of rules. They are the source of life. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” That’s the foundation for everything else, a personal relationship between these escaped slaves and their liberator. Years ago, friends of ours discovered they could not conceive a child on their own, so they pursued an adoption. They finally were able to adopt a six year old. For the first few months things went well. But, any six year old will have ideas of his own. There came a day when his new father told him to do something he didn’t want to do. The boy replied, “I don’t have to do it. You’re not my real father anyway.” To which my friend responded in no uncertain terms, “Well, I don’t know who you think I am. I’m the only father you’ve got.”

The father of Israel is “the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.” The One who speaks to Israel from Mt. Sinai is the only one who rescued Israel and the only God who makes this promise before asking for their obedience. *I am your God, your Savior, your protector. Besides me, there are no other gods. And, you shall have no other gods before me.*

It is this experience of salvation that created the people of Israel from a ragtag crowd of slaves. And, it is our experience of liberation from the slavery of sin that creates the people of God today from a bunch of sinners.

to have what does not belong to them, and when that desire for more and more takes over life, then loan officers go after commissions from bad loans; and borrowers buy on credit what they cannot pay for. We overprice what we buy and sell because we want to look like we have more than we can afford.

I do not believe that greed and covetousness need to be the motivation for our economy. We are also motivated by the satisfaction of a job well done, or a product well made. We can be happy with enough, even if “enough” is different for each of us.

More to the point for Christians, when we can acknowledge the God who saves us, and be content with what God has given us, we are freed from the rat race of materialism, freed for the joy of accomplishment and free for healthy relationships. We become in truth a free people under God. This is not political freedom that is won on the battlefield, but it is a freedom that endures, a freedom that brings inner happiness.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Galatians, “For freedom Christ has set us free (5:1).” The freedom of the gospel holds us together as followers of Jesus Christ, a togetherness we celebrate today. It is also true that the freedom of the gospel is the only freedom of the truly good life.

That freedom binds us together in joy and contentment better than all the material possessions the

world has to offer. That is the freedom we celebrate around this table.