

Transforming Life

Week three Transforming Rule

a Lent Course for 2012

produced by the Diocese of St Albans

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The Bible Reading Lent 3 **Exodus 20.1-17**

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You 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. ⁵You 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, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹For 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.

¹²Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³You shall not murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

You may prefer to save paper by only reproducing pages 2 & 3 and using bibles to read the passage.

Exodus 20.1-17

Some Reflections

“Thou shalt not...” – Those who dislike religion in today’s world portray faith as an unattractive series of gloomy commands, as if God had given the Ten Commandments to depress and terrify His people.

But it’s not that way at all. Exodus tells the story of a people on the move from slavery to freedom. In the midst of their journey, God speaks. The God who acts on the world stage suddenly draws very close to each person and offers life (the Hebrew words are addressed to “you” the individual, not “you lot” the people as a whole).

And unlike so many of the laws of the ancient world, these commandments are not conditional threats: “do this or else you’re in deep trouble”. They simply lay out a way of living that brings life and peace. In the New Covenant God promises to empower us by his Spirit for this way of living – we will explore this in week five of this course when we look at Jeremiah 31.

The ideas of the ten commandments are so deeply ingrained in our culture that we easily forget how radical they are. Respect for human life, human freedom and human flourishing is not

obvious, and in many ways is not “natural”. In many parts of the world today these things are not honoured. To transform our community so as to bring them about demands a joyous discipline - a rule of living.

If we are committed to transforming our community according to the values of the Kingdom of God, such a rule or rhythm of life is necessary. It does not have to be complicated and difficult.

Religious orders and communities through the centuries have built on this commitment to God’s word. Over 1400 years ago Benedict offered a pattern of living rooted in knowledge of God and in hospitality. And exactly the same thing can be true of the rhythm of life that you, your small group or your parish choose to live by.

To follow such a rule is not to be a slave. It is to be a free partner in God’s purposes. All the commandments of Exodus 20 are designed to set people free - free from a false idea of God, free from violence in thought or in action, free for justice and free for love.

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Questions for Discussion

If you had to summarise your 'rule of living' on the back of a visiting card, what would you write?

How does the way we live actually influence the people we know and meet, so as to bring the values of the Kingdom of God to earth where we are?

What barriers prevent us from influencing people still more?

What will we do this week to overcome these barriers?

Ideas for Action

Each person to jot down

- ◆ One thing that has struck me
- ◆ What one thing am I going to do?
- ◆ What one thing will I pray about this week?



Prayer

Spend time quietly asking God to bring to mind those whose lives are ruined, because the values of the Ten Commandments do not apply where they are.

Then name the people or situations before God, aloud or in silence.

Examine your own lifestyle. Are there any areas where the values of the Ten Commandments do not apply where you are? Commit yourself before God to bring your life into line with His rule.

Close

Finish by saying this collect and then the Living God's Love prayer together:

Loving God, your service is perfect freedom.

Teach us and help us to shape our lives in joyful obedience to your word.

Through Him who is our pattern and our Saviour, Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

Living God, draw us deeper into your love;
Jesus our Lord, send us to care and serve;
Holy Spirit, make us heralds of good news.
Stir us, strengthen us, teach and inspire us
to live your love
with generosity and joy,
imagination and courage;
for the sake of your world
and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

