

*A Sermon at St. Michal and All Angels' Church, Sandhurst on 24th March 2019 at
Evensong by Emma Hodge*

Readings: Deut 6:1-9; John 17:1-19; Psalm 28

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen

Our Old Testament reading is from Chapter six of Deuteronomy and it starts with the instructions to keep the commandments, and not just keep them, but to know them so well that they can be recited, lived, have them as decoration of their homes, taught to children and grandchildren and become part of the Jewish Identity, so that everyone would know that they are Jews, a Jewish home, because they would see the commandments. While our reading provides us with the summary of the law, a summary which is later emphasised by Jesus, it leads us to the question what are the commandments, and to find out the answer to this, we need to go back to the previous chapter, where we hear the Deuteronomical account of the ten commandments (the other account is in Exodus 20).

The Ten Commandments are well known, and lots of churches have the Exodus version as wall paintings so that people can still know them, they were said earlier today at the Book of Common Prayer Eucharist service, they are summed up by Jesus when he was asked what the greatest commandment was.

The importance of the Ten Commandments are that they needed to be part of the very identity of the Jewish people. Some of the Ten Commandments are so important that even today, if you break them, you will find yourself with a criminal conviction. The Ten Commandments can basically be split into two categories, those about loving God and those about loving one another. This is how Jesus summed them up and tonight I want to focus on those which relate to Loving God as that is the section mentioned in our Old Testament reading, a verse of which is often used by Jewish people as a prayer.

The commandments about Loving God is

- 1) Don't worship false Gods
- 2) Don't make idols.
- 3) Don't take the Lord's name in Vain
- 4) Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy

The dangers of worshipping other God's and making idols to worship may seem like something that is no longer a danger, but modern society is full of other false Gods, those of secular society where the values are complete opposite of God's. Secular society seems to put importance on celebrities and having everything, where as our God wants the importance on Him, His son and teaching and that we are community committed to caring for others and supporting each other.

The challenge that we are presented with is to realise that we need to focus all the time on knowing, understanding and loving God so that we can reject the false gods that exist in today's world.

Keeping the Sabbath as a day of rest is a command that in our society has long forgotten, our society makes it easy to fill our time with activities, not just with shopping on Sundays, sports, but also the social media and online activities but the command that God gave us is to STOP,

To stop, and spend one day a week focussing on God, focussing on God and resting, taking that time out of our lives to rest so that we can continue with the work again. God knew that lives are busy, with work family, social activities, but the command is still there to stop and spend quality time with God, quality time refreshing ourselves so that we can carry on serving God during the rest of the week in our daily activities.

When we stop and take the day of rest that we are instructed to do in the ten commandments, then we notice other things, how wonderful the world that God has created is, how blessed you are with your family and friends, this is a much about worshipping God as it is about spending time in church or studying the bible.

This commandment, like all the others, doesn't give us a caveat, there are no get out clauses, no "o but..." they are to be obeyed as they are.

The Ten Commandments, so important, not just for social order but for our very life with God, Jesus summed them up as he realised their importance. Keeping them is not just for God, it is for us, to encourage us, to support us and for our well-being – to love God, our father, the creator of the world which we live in, the provider of all that we have.

The commandments about loving God are there for us, so that we can have a meaningful relationship with God. Having the meaningful relationship with God means that we can thrive and grow as children of the God who loves us; that by Loving God, we come to know Him, and as we develop the relationship with God and our love for Him grows, then so does our faith as we realise just what God has done for us, and how this affects every aspect of our lives, from how we spend our money, to caring for the world, to how we spend our time and talents. God Loves us, this is not just an old Sunday School Hymn, but a fact, God Loves us so much that he allowed His only son to die for us on the cross. Is there anything more moving than this love? How do we respond to this loving God? Do we love him back?

The account in Deuteronomy instructs us not just to keep them but to teach them to others and one of the ways we teach others is by our example, as the saying goes, "Actions speak louder than words". The reason for keeping them is included in our Old Testament reading, it is for our prosperity. For the original people who would have been hearing them, the promise is that if they kept God's commandments then they would enter the Promised Land, a land which flows with milk and honey. For

them, this was God's promise to them and it was something that they wanted. Our promise from God is different, but it still requires us to Love God and just like it needed to be part of the Jewish identity, it also needs to be part of our Christian identity. This is where the challenge is..

Is Loving God part of our Christian Identity, an identity that is clearly visible to others?

So the question is not just, **do we say we love God**, but **do we carry that out in actions** and **are those actions notable** so they are clearly visible to everyone we meet?