



LOVING THE TRUTH & WHAT YOU HAVE: *JESUS*

Pastor Jeff Wood
Eastminster Presbyterian
March 8/9, 2008

A lady went off on a holiday to London and left her husband in charge of the family and home. She called a few days later to see how things were. Her husband said, "The cat died." The woman was distraught. It was a favorite cat. After some desperate moments she told her husband, "With something like this, Honey, you have to go slowly. You could have said, 'The cat went on the roof and I can't get him down.' Then when I call tomorrow you can say that the cat fell but he's at the vet's. Then when I call the next day you could say, 'The vet couldn't save him.' Do you understand?" The husband replied, "Yes, I think so." Then the wife asked, "How's mother?" "She's on the roof," he said.

Just so, we are at the ninth commandment about not telling lies. Of course, it is more than that. It is telling the truth. Not being brutally truthful but having no lapses of integrity.

Let's pray.

Here's a magazine cover. It is the Top Ten issue of *Handyman*. The top ten cleaning tricks. The top ten steps to a safer home. The top ten ways to stop mold and mildew. We grab magazines like this and read them with gusto. Does it seem like we are less eager when we hear it is God's ten commandments for a good life? But indeed, he has given us ten coordinates for the good life and we have been looking at them two per week for Lent.

Here they are. *Put God first*. No other gods before me. *Watch how you define God*. No idols. *Reverence him in thought, word, and deed*. No taking him in vain. *Spend time with him*. That is, keep the Sabbath. These four cover what Jesus put as, "Love God with your all." The fifth command is to *honor parents*. But also *honor life* (no murder). *Honor faithfulness* (no adultery). *Honor what belongs to God and others* (no stealing). These cover what Jesus put as, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Now let's read the final two commands out loud together.

Exodus 20:16-17 -- "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*" The Word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth and from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace.

In the novel [The Yearling](#) Penny Baxter wants to sell his useless dog. In that part of the world people bragged on their dogs and the more they bragged, the more everyone knew they were lying. So Penny said to his neighbor, 'This is the sorriest dog ever.' The neighbor thought, 'No one talks down their dog so Penny must be meaning he's a good dog.' The next day the neighbor came over insisting on trading his good gun for the dog. As the neighbor left with the dog in tow, Penny's conscience began to bother him because of how he played his neighbor. The son said, "You told the truth." The dad replied, "My words were true but my intention was as crooked as the Oklawaha River." The command is about a lot more than not telling lies. It's about our intentions, about how we are, our honesty.

As the news this week showed political candidates insisting how important NAFTA is to them ... now that they are in Ohio, as my computer has a phishing filter to alert me to when I am on a scam website, as I watched a commercial for the tv show *The Moment of Truth* with its lie detector tests, as I

watched newspaper stories about a sport hero and his trainer testify against each other on Capitol Hill, I thought about the first lie I ever remember telling. Do you remember yours?

I don't know that I can remember my first lie (and it is strange to say "first" because it indicates there's been more than one!). But I can remember a time when my littlest sister was born and from my dad's dresser I snatched one of the cigars he had been passing out. When I was confronted it seems to me that I said something really dumb like, "I took the quarter that was on Dad's dresser but not the cigar." What was I doing?? My parents didn't even know about the quarter. Of course, I was "copping" to a lesser crime to distract them from the real one. And of course, I was green in the face from trying to smoke that cigar so all my fibbing was for naught.

Did you notice how I called it fibbing? We do that don't we? Euphemisms package the truth so they are less harsh and we even have euphemisms for lying. We say fibbing, exaggerating, being careless with the truth, telling tales, stretching things a little, white lies, and "it's just flattery." We call it fibbing for the same reason we lie – we don't want to be naked with the facts. We're fearful of the consequences, of being thought poorly of, of punishment, of simply being caught.

There are times when people tell lies not to protect themselves but to protect others -- like with a child about the seriousness of mom's disease. We can debate about the rightness or wrongness of that. We do have a place or two in the Bible where lies seem to be sanctioned because without the lie, life would be lost – for example, there's an Old Testament story of Rahab hiding spies and in her rooftop. When she's asked the whereabouts of the spies, she lies. But it saved their lives.

Other times people tell lies to hurt people. Two supposed witnesses told lies about Jesus. They said he indicated he'd destroy the temple. They did that because the leaders were jealous, wanted to flex their power, wanted Jesus out of the way. They wanted to hurt him.

The command is a little complicated but not in the basic point. We are to be truthful people. See, truth is absolutely necessary to relationships between people and people's relationship with reality. Here's a little story that proves it.

A son lied to his mother. She caught him in it. Maybe he took a cigar and said he didn't. I don't know. But he had been lectured already on the importance of telling the truth. Still it happened. So she said, "I'll treat you for one week the way you have just treated me." The next morning as they were going to school she praised him for something and said, "After school, when I pick you up, we'll go get French fries (a major treat)." When she picked him up and drove home, he reminded her about the French fries. She looked at him and said, "I lied." And on it went until the son could stand it no more. Did she praise him? Was he praiseworthy? Was she his mother? Would she pick him up? Would he ever get French fries? Would this only go on for a week? He got the lesson. And so do we. We know that relationships, a sense of what is real, what we can trust, who we can trust is all thrown into total disarray, such that our sanity would come into question if we do not know what and who we can trust. Billy Joel used to sing, "Honesty, it's mostly what I need from you." How true.

I said it is complicated, so I am not even going to go into what a husband should say when his wife asks, "Do I look fat in this?" But telling the truth doesn't mean that you blab every thing on your mind so as to be honest.

Nor does it mean that when someone is tearing down another's reputation that you can stand there silently and believe you are not bearing false witness. Our Presbyterian Book of Confessions speaks of the ninth commandment in terms of justice and love and says, because of this command, we are to "defend and promote the honor and reputation of my neighbor." (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 43) The Quakers used to ask in reference to this command, "Do you avoid tale bearing and detraction and are you careful concerning the reputation of others?" Do you see – don't tell lies means tell the truth, considerately. It means guard your neighbor's welfare. It means keep your word. It means integrity.

Here's something to think about. Are we bearing false witness if we belong to Jesus and don't let anyone know?

Ahh, but we must rush along. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, or anything that belongs to him. If command #8, thou shalt not commit adultery, means "keepa you *hands* off your neighbor's wife," command #10 means "keepa you *heart* off your neighbor's wife ... and, in fact, off your neighbor's life." Jesus made plain that doing the right thing was more than just technical, outward compliance. So, for example, not committing adultery physically but being full of lust internally was just baloney. It's the same thing in command #10. Covet means desire. You don't even have to act it out. The internal desire for your neighbor's wife and life means something is wrong.

When we say, "I covet your prayers," that's not a bad thing. Desire isn't necessarily a bad thing. God gave us desires. But when the desire is ungoverned, overboard, and selfish, it is a bad thing. And one of the strange ways it goes overboard is seen all the time with toddlers. One little boy has no interest whatsoever in the blue toy truck *until* the other boy picks it up. Then he has to have it, now! And God preserve us from how sometimes the desire for the neighbor's wife may not be simply that she is beautiful, but rather that she simply is another's.

The first instance of covet in the Bible is Eve coveting the fruit of the tree that was off limits. Was it desire for the fruit or was it desire for the fruit that was off limits? Paul reports in Romans 7 that he thought of himself as an okay guy, as spiritually doing fine, until he read, "Do not covet." Then he realized that just to be told, "Do not" got him wanting to do just that. He realized that he was absolutely filled with desire, after restless desire, after demanding desire, after elusive desire, after hounding desire, after corrupting desire, after sensual desire, after ego-feeding desire.

I once told you that, more often than not, our lives are not so busy because they are so full, as that they are so busy because they are so empty. In the same way, our desires are so rampant not because we are so full but because we are so empty. St. Augustine said there is a hole inside of us. We throw into it the right possessions, the right person, the right power. It doesn't do. If only I had this – another "right" possession, "right" person, "right" power. If only I was on that side of the fence with its green grass. If only I had more ... more land, more money, more status, more youth, more wisdom, more PhDs, more religious experiences, more spiritual gifts, more admiration from others, more admiration from God, more.

But it is a God-shaped hole that is inside of us, that only God can fill. This attempt to fill the hole with something other than God, is why covet in the Bible is linked with idolatry. It is trying to make something other than God take care of the God work in our life, trying to get something God-like from something that is not God.

This is why, I think, the command is where it is. It is a bookend. The first was no other gods before Him. The last says that until you are satisfied with God, trusting that with him you have all things, ... until that happens you will want and want and want. Until you get rid of the most sneaky of idols, your faith in you and your profound judgment to know what is right and what is best, you will want and want.

Do you find yourself so filled with hounding desire? Take it to Jesus. He does not bear false witness. Indeed, this word became flesh. If you want the coordinates to the good life, they are here. But if they were paint-by-numbers, you'd fill them in and see the face of God. He's this way. He is faithful. So take your desire to Jesus.

Jesus told one woman, "After I give you what I have to give you, you will never thirst again." Are you wearied by your desire? Take it to Jesus. He told another, "I will give you rest." One of his followers, the one who said, "I was fine until I read the law, 'Do not covet,'" having gone to him for rest, for drink, said, "I've learned the secret of being content in any and every situation – it's Him. I have Him." (Phil 4.12-13)

There then commands nine and ten – no false witness, no coveting. He does not lie. Let him be the desire that finally fills you up.

So we conclude this Lenten study. We move next week to the week of the cross. These two tablets that we have studied were given at Sinai and this cross was given at Calvary. These commands said who God is and what he is like. This cross said who God is and what he is like. These we broke. This one we killed. Because we did not keep these, he came here to keep us. And give thanks that in these and in Him here there is revealed the face and the grace of God for you and for me. Amen.

If you would like to talk with someone about this message or your spiritual life, or to have someone pray with you, the pastors and elders of the church would welcome your call.

Eastminster Presbyterian Church

Reaching Up! Reaching Out! Reaching In!

106 N. Riverside Drive, Indialantic FL 32903

(321)723-8371 www.epcfl.org