

SERMON  
 First Lutheran Church  
 Aitkin, Minnesota  
 August 14, 2016

Exodus 20:14  
 Matthew 5:27-32  
 John 8:3-11

## **ADULT MESSAGE**

**“You shall not commit adultery.”** This week our preaching series focuses on the sixth commandment. You may recall that Luther grounds our keeping of each and all of the commandments in our **fear and love of God**. **Fear of God** - awesome God created me, gives me everything I need for life each day, gives me the people who surround me every day, and holds all of history in God’s hands. I owe everything I have to God. **Awesome God**. **Love of God** – loving God took on human flesh to become one of us, died on a wicked cross in order to prove God’s amazing love for us, rose from the dead, forgave us for killing him and then promised to keep all of God’s people safely in God’s care now and forever. **Loving God**.

I try to keep the Ten Commandments because God is so **awesome** and so **loving** toward me. God is the source of my life and of my love. Thanks be to God. **And I’m trying to love God back. But I don’t always do so well.** **“You shall not commit adultery.”** I have committed adultery.

God has invited each of us to be a part of a great circle of love. The greatest commandment, according to Jesus and the whole Old Testament is, **“You shall love the Lord your God with your heart... soul... mind and strength.”** Jesus adds, **“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”** We were created to be in a **love/trust relationship** with God and with each other, and with the whole creation. It’s a big circle. God’s love means to flow from God to us, to each other, to creation and back again. If any part is wounded or broken, the whole circle suffers.

The first three commandments teach us about our relationship with God. The last seven commandments teach us about our relationship with other people and the earth. The sixth commandment focuses primarily on the **relationship between spouses**. You heard Luther’s explanation. **“We are to fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honorable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.”**

**Well, that's not fair.** Luther must have this wrong. I have never had sexual relations with anyone outside of my marriage. I should be safe on this commandment. But Luther says that not only are we **supposed to keep ourselves only for our spouses sexually**, but he goes on to say that we must treat our spouses with **“love and respect.”** Yes, I must be totally faithful to my spouse and her to me sexually. But, I must also **always treat her with total love and respect.** I'm down. There have been far too many times when I have not treated my wife in the way that she as a spouse or even as a human being deserves. Maybe you've done better than me in your relationships. Luther spoke these words about respect and **love**, having **deep concern for the well-being** of your spouse, in a day when, 500 years ago, wives were little more than property.

**“You shall not commit adultery.”** In the **Old Testament**, adultery spoke of **“illicit sexual relations with someone other than one's marriage partner.”** (Harper's Bible Dictionary) Adultery could only be committed against the husband. Adultery was punishable by death for both guilty parties. **Jesus** makes it clear, in the **New Testament**, that men can commit adultery against their wives as well. Jesus said this at a time when a man could divorce his wife for burning his breakfast. And she could only divorce him if he committed adultery. Why did the Pharisees bring only the **woman** caught in adultery to Jesus for stoning to death? Why did Jesus answer them, **“Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her?”** Why did those accusers, starting with the oldest fellows, wander away without killing the young woman? Why did Jesus say to her, **Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, “No one, Sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”** (John 8:3-11)

**“You shall not commit adultery.”** I've been faithful to my wife. But I haven't always treated her with the utmost love and respect.

Jesus said, **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”** (Matthew 5:27-28.) Lust means to **“look at a woman outside your marriage with desire.”** Do you remember when **President Jimmy Carter** had the great wisdom to grant Playboy Magazine an interview? In that interview, Jimmy

Carter admitted that he had **“lusted.”** The world went wild. Our president lusted. Jimmy Carter, a Southern Baptist lusted! And after all the hoopla, I thought, **“Humph, it must be just Jimmy and me...”**

I’m sure that none of you have ever looked with desire at someone other than your marriage partner. I’m sure that none of you have ever been unfaithful to your spouse. I’m sure that none of you look at pornography. I’m sure that none of you ever treat your spouse in a less than respectful and loving manner. I’m sure that none of you have ever experienced a divorce, or have family members or friends who have been dragged through that hell.

God made us to live in a love trust relationship with God, each other and the creation. All over the world, and all over our lives, we experience broken marriages, broken relationships, broken faith in God and in other people. The world rips relationships apart. God works to keep them together, to heal them, to renew them, to enrich them.

God grieves our broken relationships even with the **enemy**. Even more, God grieves our broken relationships with our **friends, parents, siblings, spouses, significant others, children and grandchildren**. And most of all, God grieves when our **relationship with God** suffers, stretches, breaks or is lost. **But only from one end**. God won’t let go of us. Even when we give up on the awesome God who loves us totally, God won’t give up on us. We have a **God who lives forgiveness, second chances and fresh starts** with us again and again and again. You and I will **never get our lives totally right**. We will **never love perfectly**. We will **never measure up to God’s hopes and dreams for us**. But God says, **“I still love you. Trust me.”**

And here we sit in church today. Everybody **looks pretty fine**. **Inside, where only we ourselves can see**, there may be a **different story**. There’s lots of junk on the internet. This one is true.

**[The Things We Carry to Church](#)**, Chad Bird, August 8, 2016, Theological Reflections

We carry our heavy silence from last night's fight after the kids were tucked into bed. We carry the bladed words ripping through the one we swore to love and cherish. We carry the silence of a marriage in its death throes. We carry such things to church.

We carry our buried desire for someone, anyone, to take notice of us, talk to us, show us that we're not just useless human failures, that our existence does matter, that we mean something to someone.

We carry our second wedding ring—or, if you're like me, third—and along with that golden band, rusted memories of ex-loves and stubborn hopes of "this time, yes, by God, this time it will last."

We carry that picture in our wallet of the daughter we haven't spoken to in three years, four months, and two days, the one who has aborted us from her life, but whose presence is still as near as the hot tears that rolled down our face on her 25th birthday last week.

We carry our disappointment with God, with his brutal deafness to our fervent prayers, his wanton stripping away of what once made us giddy with happiness, his frigid silence when we scream for help.

We carry all these things, and much more.

We carry them in silence, often wrapped behind the mantle of a smile.

We carry them to church.

And there, standing within the walls of his Father's house, is our brother. He carries in his scarred body a heart that beats only to the rhythm of love for us. He carries a word on his lips that bears within itself all the power of heaven to heal our deepest wounds. He carries on his shoulders a cross whose wood is stained with the blood of a God who hurled everything wrong in our universe into the black hole of his own cursed death.

This brother, Jesus of Nazareth, is Jesus of the dying marriage, Jesus of the lonely victim, Jesus of the divorced, Jesus of the weeping parent, Jesus of the embittered worshiper who strikes out like a wounded child with words that damn his Father above. He is Jesus of sinners. He is Jesus of the soiled, of the shamed, of those who are sickened by what they see in the mirror.

He is embarrassed by none of them. They are welcome in his church. **Only they** will feel at home in his Father's house anyway. This is not a place for those who have no problems, never do wrong, and imagine heaven is constantly clapping over their stellar life performance. Such golden people needn't go slumming in God's house.

Church is for the lost and losers, the hurting and bleeding, the walking or crawling or carried-on-a-stretcher wounded. The church is not a mirror-covered Gold's gym to flex our spiritual pecs (muscles) but a temple where the defiled are cleansed and made holy. The church is where poor, stinking fools are bathed and robed as sons and daughters of the King.

The things we carry to church—these burdens our Brother removes. He stacks them atop his own broad shoulders. “I’ll carry them now,” he says. “I’ve got this. If I carried all the vast wrongs of the world to the cross then surely I can bear whatever pains you. **Come to me, all you who are weary of being you, and simply be mine.** My child. My beloved. I will bear your burdens from now on. And I’ll bear you. Stop trying to be your own lousy excuse for a god and I’ll be the only God you need. I’ll pick you up and we’ll walk together into the future. Be it dark or light or a shadowed existence raging with uncertainty—it doesn’t matter. Yea, though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I am the resurrection and the life. I am *your* resurrection and life.”

The things we carry to church are nothing compared to the one who bears them for us from the church, into tomorrow, and into the unending days when we are finally Home with our Father above.

I’ve broken every single commandment, some of them every day. The commandments are meant to **help keep this world going.** **And** the commandments are meant to **show us how much we need Jesus and each other.** God doesn’t need us. We need God. And God is always ready. Welcome home. Thanks be to God. Amen.