

Sermon, November 4, 2018

Rev. Cindy Corrigan

Rules, rules and more rules.

Aren't we overrun by rules. If we take a moment to think about them all, it becomes very overwhelming – Federal rules, Provincial rules, municipal rules and bylaws. There are so many of them that we can't begin to remember or know them all. Thousands and thousands of rules, that are there to ensure our safety and the safety of others, to ensure good land use, the care of creation – our lands and oceans, our roads and highways. Education and health care, and the people who provide the services. Most often put in place because of negative behaviours.

Add into the mix the Anglican Church of Canada canons (23), the Provincial Canons (10) and the Diocesan canons (9 with 66 regulations) as well as the rules and policies that regulate our work here at St Mary's – all well intentioned, but again overwhelming. As I enter into my ministry in the Diocese, I have been reading all the relevant Canons, policies and regulations, I see the rationale for all the rules. We are to look after our parishioners and community members. There need to be rules and regulations to ensure we are all following the same protocols. It is so important to look after Gods children, that there need to be rules. How do we understand the need for all these rules, laws and regulations so we don't just dismiss them all as irrelevant? Can we look at them in the same we look at the commandments in the Gospel reading this morning?

There 613 commandments that come out of the first 5 books of the Old Testament. 365 are negative commandments, instructing to abstain from certain acts. I've been able to find some definitions for the word COMMANDMENT. I think sometimes we struggle with the word as being so confining and restrictive.

I found this definition in the Ancient-Hebrew.org web site:

"The word command, as well as commandment, are used to translate the Hebrew word mitzvah but does not properly convey the meaning of mitzvah. The word command implies words of force or power. The word mitzvah is better understood as a **directive**.

The verbal root of mitzvah means to direct one on a journey. The mitzvah of the Bible are not commands, or rules and regulations, they are directives or landmarks that we look for to guide us." Such a more encouraging word. Where are we going? What are the landmarks we are looking for?

Another understanding of commandments comes from My Jewish Learning.com

"Observing the commandments is, in Jewish tradition, less important than the actual performing of the commandments themselves: One might say that the "deed" is more important than the "creed." That is, how we behave in this world, towards our fellow human beings and the world we live in, is ultimately of more importance than what we may believe". The 611 not referred to by Jesus are not irrelevant, just not as important as a directive, a direction for us to live our lives in a positive life sustaining way.

Which brings us to the message in the Gospel this morning - JESUS POINTS OUT IN THE GOSPEL THAT THE TWO commandments or directives that are to be first are from the Old Testament teachings: one from Deut – “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength.” And the second is from Leviticus 19 - “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. In this scripture reading we Jesus bringing the OT into the NT and making it totally relevant to us in our day to day lives. In our Christian life – which comes first – Our Love for God, or Gods love for us? 1 John 4 states “In this is love; not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another – We love because he first loved us.”

I think that defining the word Love is helpful –

Richard Rohr daily reading states: “There are many different kinds of love. Ancient Greeks had multiple distinct words for what we try to cover with our single word "love"; these include philia (friendship), eros (passion), storge (familial love), and agape (infinite or divine love)”.

As we read and try to understand the second commandment and the love that is being sought after agape is the word we are looking for - "Agape" love is a determination of the will that no matter who this person is, no matter what kind of relationship we have with them, no matter how they treat us, no matter if they injure or grieve us, we will seek their best. This is tough love, not a feeling of the heart but a resolve of the will. It's the love God has for all of us, love no matter

what. Agape is an action. Its about practical, self-sacrificial care for another, whether we like them or not, whether we feel like it or not. So Jesus' two great commandments are NOT telling us to FEEL anything, but rather to love God and love our neighbour by our ACTIONS.

How do we live these two commandments out – in the first commandment it states “with our heart, mind, soul and strength”. These are four kinds of love we can offer to God in gratitude for what he has done for us. By our Heart – meaning our will, the part that makes decisions and choices to live a faithful life. By our Mind – to think carefully about what this faithful life will look like. By our Soul – the whole person. And by our Strength – showing that none of this will be easy, we will need to be strong and committed making every effort to stick to it.

The second commandment is loving neighbour – Jesus is asking us to look after others as we look after ourselves – not a feeling but again an action. If we are hungry – we eat, if we are cold – we clothe. Jesus is challenging us to give the same practical care to others.

When we put our faith in God, we receive the gift of eternal life. When we have received our gift of eternal live these 2 commandments then guide us as to how we live our lives in such as way as to demonstrate our gratitude to the one who has loved us so absolutely. They don't refer to our feelings but to the loving actions with which God calls us to serve him and serve our neighbour.

If we live these two directives out in our world, the rest of the rules and regulations have less control on our lives, we are freer to be the people of God, called by name and held in love.

Thanks be to God