

St. David's Presbyterian Church  
St. John's, NL  
"I Need Thee"  
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Second Sunday of Epiphany

Everyone knows that God has a top ten. Some people may have thought that only the late night television hosts have a top ten. But God has a top ten, and I call it that because we usually use the word "commandment" and that doesn't get at the original as I understand it. It's more like the top ten principles, structuring ideas, the best ideas for humanity. And do you remember the first of those ten?

Yes, the Scripture says in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 that the first principle or commandment is to be in right relationship with God, to not be confused about God, and to not let something or someone else take God's rightful place. This is something that humanity has not done well to keep.

In fact, we have broken all of the ten, most of us in our thoughts or deeds. It reminds us that we need God to transform us and make us more into the people that we need to be. The first principle or commandment deals with the temptation of idolatry. While in some cultures this might mean having a room in a statue in it, or a place in the yard with a shrine, in our culture "idolatry" usually refers to that which we devote ourselves to, which we cannot stop doing. Some people refer to this category of problem as "addiction" and others debate whether addictions exist outside of substance abuse.

The point is that we all have needs, and we all go somewhere to fill our needs. Where do you go to fill your needs? Do you know? If you don't know, that would be a good topic for Sunday dinner with the person that you trust.

The apostle Paul brought up the subject with the Corinthian Christians who probably had asked him a number of questions about what God thinks about some of their former practices as non-Christians, formerly knowing nothing about what God wants for our lives. He sets out principles in 1 Corinthians 6 that help us with determining what is an addiction or idolatry. (I use the terms interchangeably, one as a biblical term and the other as a cultural one, both destructive in God's eyes.)

1 Corinthians 6:12 “All things are lawful for me, but not everything is beneficial” (NRSV) or “I have the right to do anything, you say—but not everything is beneficial.” (TNIV)

You see, the Corinthian Christians were really into their new found freedom in Christ. Unfortunately, they had no sense for what God wanted for them. So they had enough so called “freedom” that they rejoiced with a man who was sleeping with his mother-in-law (ch. 5). They had so much so called freedom that some were getting drunk at communion (ch. 11), others were not getting any communion elements at all. They were suing each other in the courts of the day (ch. 6). All these activities were taking place under the rubric of “freedom.” So Paul had to set up the fact that they did indeed enjoy a great deal of freedom in what they could do as Christians, but they still had to learn about the difference between freedom to do what pleases God and freedom to do whatever you please. We today also need to learn what this means.

So Paul suggests that they might have the right to do all kinds of things, but not everything is helpful or beneficial. Anything that masters you (TNIV) that dominates you (NRSV) that becomes something that you can't stop, that becomes an addiction, now that is a problem, in fact it's idolatry. Because what you give yourself to, is a form of worship. And you should only be giving yourself to the Lord in worship.

Paul gives examples. His first example is food. Paul acknowledges that food and the stomach are temporary, as temporary as this life. But we shouldn't be slaves to food, addicted to food as junkies are addicted to illegal street drugs. We should be able to control what we put in our mouths. Some of us do this better than others. The point is that we live in a society that is obese and individuals are unable to stop. We know it is bad for our health, and bad for our quality of life, but we still go on in our food addictions. And we need help. Many of us do need help in this area. If you do need help, ask someone you trust to begin to help you in your nutrition and eating habits. Find a group that seeks to keep you on track with what you determine to do in this area.

The point that Paul makes later is that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and we need to take care of them, even more than we take care of our homes or cars or other possessions. That's why his second example of illicit sex is another that God calls us to consider. Paul says that something

spiritual happens as we choose to sexually encounter another person. A unity develops, even if it sex that we pay money to receive. So Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians to stop what they used to do. And we too need acknowledge if any of us have problems in the sexual area, whether it be an addiction, or an occasional problem, it is not simply something two consenting adults choose to do, nor one person in their minds. It is a question of the stewardship of the temple of God. That is what God calls our bodies as is made clear in this passage. Your body is a temple of the living God, a great privilege and therefore Paul simply asks the Corinthian Christians and us today to honor God with our bodies, for this reason.

These are not easy areas to talk about because they are very private. Nevertheless, God wants to engage us even in the most intimate parts of our lives. As you reach out to God in these areas of food and sex, I also encourage you to reach out to a trusted friend, spouse or family member to practice what the Scriptures tell us is an appropriate stewardship of our bodies. We are not finger pointing in this, many of us have work to do in these areas.

And finally in this question of where we go when we are needy, we go back to the 1 Samuel passage and the John passage. Here we find a young boy hearing a voice at night, whether in a dream, or in a waking state, we don't know, but we do know Samuel hears God's voice and responds to Him. Now hearing the audible voice of the Lord is indeed a rare experience. Normally we hear God through the Scriptures and through the wisdom of trusted believers. But we are encouraged as Samuel was, to have that stance in our hearts, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." This is a good way to start your prayers, and then it is wise to be discerning the voice of the Lord versus many other voices, thoughts, and tapes that might begin to run as we simply try to say our prayers in a two way direction. We need help to discern what God's voice sounds like in our thoughts, reflections and meditations, and what other voices sound like. God does speak to us, and it will always be in conformity with the Scriptures. But we do need to want to hear.

"I need Thee" is more than just a choir anthem. It is the cry of our hearts, in our addictions. It is the cry of our hearts towards God, towards getting our needs met. It is also the cry of the praying heart, "I need Thee." Sometimes we respond to God as Nathanael responded to Philip, when he told him that Jesus was from Nazareth. Can anything good come from Nazareth, which

was a town known for its rebels and infamous characters? The quick answer would have been that Jesus was from Bethlehem, the foretold birthplace of the Messiah. But that was not common knowledge at that time. So Jesus was judged by where He came from. This is still true today, isn't it? As on the mainland, "Ohh, you're from Newfoundland, I see." Are even here, "Ohh, you're from away, are you?"

Wherever we are from, wherever we are going, we all have the invitation before us, "Come and see." Come and see what God can do in your life. Come and see the transformative power of Jesus. Come and see what your part is in the family of God, the community of Jesus. Come and see what God can do in those areas of your life that you cannot manage. Come and see.

Let us pray.