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# OUT OF THE HOUSE OF BONDAGE: TEN WORDS OF FREEDOM

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A SERMON SERIES By Jack Hardaway



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GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH  
Anderson SC

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Out of the House of Bondage: Ten Words of freedom

Jack Hardaway

## **ONE, TWO BUCKLE MY SHOE**

The story goes that a diocese was interviewing a group of nominees for a bishop election.

The nominees were up on stage for the audience to ask questions.

A youth delegate came to the microphone and asked, “What are the ten commandments?”

The first nominee bumbled around and named most but not all.

The second nominee said he preferred Jesus summary of the Law, to love God and love neighbor. And left it that.

The third nominee asked which version did she mean, since scripture has several versions and they all differ in some way. The youth delegate said, “pick one”, and the nominee couldn’t.

Ever since I heard that story I have anxiety dreams of being put on the spot. A lay awake at night trying to count them out, and I always seem to forget at least one, always a different one left out each time.

Part of the irony is that I have had an ongoing fascination with the Decalogue, I have read books, taught dozens of classes, lead an entire summer camp session on it.

It is humbling and humorous.

I prefer the title Decalogue, the ten words, tapping into the biblical river of the word of God speaking the world into creation, and the word of the Lord coming to the prophets, respeaking a broken world back into wholeness, and the Word made flesh.

Ten words that reveal God and that respeak the world back together, that recreate.

Which is a long way from having ten rules not to break.

The preface to the commandments says it all: I like the Rite I version best, it goes “I am the Lord thy God who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house bondage.”

That is the preface for each of the Ten Words. Not just the first word.

Each word is about being set free.

The medicine for this poison that ails us?

Thanksgiving.

Giving thanks for others. For who they are, warts and all.

Giving thanks for who we are, warts and all.

It is the gateway to perception, to true sight, to true witness.

The Eucharist is the great thanksgiving of God on our behalf.

God sees truly, and rejoices.

We give our lives to God in thanksgiving, and God takes our broken lives, blesses them, and gives them back and says, “Surprise me.”

Ten words of freedom.

Count them over and over.

They are more than rules. They show us God.

Speak the word that sets the world free.

Our consumer economy and culture, on the bad days, is built upon coveting.

On the good days we covet good things like freedom, clean air and water, good jobs, safe space for children, justice for all, not just the privileged. Things like that.

I remember Bishop Henderson would always say that he coveted our prayers.

I like that.

So the consumer economy and culture can be a very good thing. But on the bad days it twists our hearts, and we become seething, mindless, addicts of want.

Coveting is where the seven deadly sins and the Decalogue overlap, envy.

Of all the sins, coveting is the most poisonous. Most sin involves something good being twisted into something bad.

There is something pleasurable about most sin.

Not envy, not coveting, there is no pleasure. It simply saps all the life and joy out of everything. Pure poison.

It blinds us from seeing the miraculous, the beautiful, and the ordinary.

It is a bloated ever-expanding hunger.

It is the addiction that is consuming our bodies, our country, our freedom, and the vast ecosystem of all creation. It turns the garden into the garbage pit.

The word is setting us free from the house of bondage, from the house of coveting.

We are being set free to rejoice in other people's gifts and graces. Our eyes are being opened to really see others as the miracles that they are.

The best people in the world, and the happiest people in the world, are those who have the freedom to rejoice in and encourage the gifts that others have.

Think of all the great coaches and encouragers in your life. They are those who are set free from coveting, who can see the amazing thing that everyone around them is and is becoming.

The first two words are for today. I'll give a reflection on two a week, except maybe the Sunday the Bishop comes, I still don't know what he plans to do.

You shall have no other god's but me.

You shall not make for yourself any idol.

It touches on the Gospel this morning with the devil's bargain for Jesus to fall down and worship him and he will give Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. And Jesus says, "Away with you Satan, for it is written, (and quotes Deuteronomy) Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him."

We often think that idolatry is about literally bowing down to a graven image, or to having our priorities out of order.

And those are true things, true concerns.

But these two words are about what enslaves us, what owns us.

Idols, false Gods, bring only bondage, they own us.

The Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt out of the house of bondage, brings freedom.

The first two words bid us pause and consider, are we free, or are we in bondage?

If we choose love then we are free.

If we choose otherwise then we are in the house of bondage, we have fallen to the ground and worshiped the devil.

These first two words reveal God as the one who brings freedom. Which is a comfort.

These first two words also challenge us to ask, who do I bow down before, what owns me?

Next week the third and fourth words, about taking the Lord's name in vain, and keeping the Sabbath.

Speak the word that sets the world free.

Lent 2a 2023; 5 March

Out of the House of Bondage: Ten Words of freedom

Jack Hardaway

### **THREE, FOUR SHUT THE DOOR**

The television news crew pulls up to the house with Ten Commandment signs up all over the front yard. The signs are in protest

to the commandments being taken out of schools, and court houses. They interview the homeowner, and in the course of the interview the homeowner is asked if he can name the Ten Commandments, he thinks about it and says that no, no he can't. "But that isn't the point", he then adds.

There is an ironic silence.

The unspoken question is, "Then what is the point?"

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. Or, another way to say it, you shall not invoke with malice the Name of the Lord your God. The third word of the decalogue, the third word of being set free from the house of bondage.

This is the second week of a sermon series on the Decalogue, and we begin with that third word.

Usually, we think it simply means not to curse, not to call God's damnation onto whatever difficult situation that accosts us. Such as calling God's wrath down upon a car door which slams on your thumb, or calling fire and brimstone down upon a hot iron that someone hands you, as you hear the sizzle of the skin before the pain reaches the brain.

Or, when someone is brutalized.

This commandment isn't about that. Those moments of trauma are worthy of intense devotional protest.

Taking the Lord's name in vain is something much more insidious and deadly.

It is using God for my own personal advantage. Using God as an excuse to hurt and control someone else. Using the Bible as a weapon against someone else, to build myself up and to hurt and control someone else.

It is pure spiritual poison.

God is setting us free from that.

The Bible has killed, mauled and abused more people than fire arms ever have.

We don't even know how to speak the Lord's name, or to use scripture except as how to control and hurt others.

We have to start over.

How do we speak God's name as blessing?

How do we use scripture as grace?

That is the third word of the decalogue, it reveals God as blessing, it reveals the word as grace and gift.

Christianity, and American Christianity especially, has to start all

To be in the truth, is to be in Christ, to be choosing love when others choose the lie of hate, and the deceptions that hate hides behind.

Be the true witness in a world of false witness, a world of deception, and manipulation, a world that uses and devours.

The truth, that is the person of Jesus, tells us, "Listen carefully: I am sending you out like sheep among wolves; so be wise as serpents, and innocent as doves."

Being truthful sometimes means we must be wise as serpents and innocent as doves... we are sent out like sheep among wolves, and being true witnesses can be tricky.

Like the Christians hiding and smuggling Jews under Nazi Germany, being true witnesses required that they lie.

Like the Christians who hid slaves and smuggled them to freedom here in our own country, being true witnesses required that they lie. Like speaking the truth in love, which is different than the truth that hurts. Truth telling is about building up and restoring others.

Like God deceiving the devil, when the powers of death and hell took the body of Jesus, and discovered God hidden within, bursting hell open from the inside out, the divine Trojan Horse putting hell in an uproar because it was done away with.

Truth is as wise as serpents and innocent as doves. The truth can be tricky and paradoxical.

The true witness of God is that God sets the captives free from the predatory lies that devour and feed upon humanity and creation.

Thou shalt be a true witness, a witness of the truth, who is a person. Truth has a body, truth has a name, truth is personal, truth bleeds. Therefore, be reverent to all bodies, to all names, to all that bleed. That is how we accept Jesus into our hearts.

Being infected with reverence and awe.

That is truth.

That is the true witness.

And then there was one.

The tenth word of freedom.

Thou shalt not covet.

Or, You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor.

This is the one that we just don't give much attention to.

Next week, the last two words of the decalogue that set the world free. Thou shalt not bare false witness, and thou shalt not covet. The two that we don't talk about all that much, but probably should.

Speak the word that sets the world free.

Lent 5a 2023; 26 March

Out of the House of Bondage: Ten Words of Freedom

Jack Hardaway

### **NINE, TEN A BIG FAT HEN**

There are lies, and then there are damned lies.  
There are little white lies and then there are whoppers.  
There is the wicked web we weave when we practice to deceive,  
and then there is being caught in a web of lies.  
There are the people of the lie, and there are the lying liars and the lies they lie.

There is the father of lies, and then there is the way, the truth and the light.

There is Pilate saying "what is truth" as truth is taken from the room, under arrest to be executed as a capital crime, exposing the lie that capital punishment keeps speaking.  
There are dry bones, and then there is the flesh and blood of resurrection.

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.  
Or, the rite 2 version, you shall not be a false witness.  
Or, the short hand, "Don't lie."  
Or, as the catechism says, "To speak the truth, and to not mislead others by our silence."

This is the fifth, and final, sermon in a series about the decalogue, the ten words that set us free from the house of bondage, the truth that sets us free to be free indeed, free enough to choose love.

Today we hear the ninth and tenth words, about false witness, and coveting.

The truth about lying is that it is any kind of deliberate deception.  
Spoken or unspoken.  
And the truth about truth is that truth is a person.

over again, and relearn to speak God's name as blessing, and to use scripture as pure unconditional grace.

We are disarmed and moved to ironic silence.

I feel like I have been in a twelve step recovery for using the Lord's name in vain for the past 15 years, I have had to relearn the faith, I have had to reread scripture.

How do I live and proclaim the Gospel that really is good news, all the time, for everyone?

The road to freedom is humbling.

The fourth word of the decalogue is "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy." It is the fourth word of being set free from the house of bondage.

The last day of creation, the seventh day, the Lord rested.

The pinnacle of creation is God's Sabbath rest. The other six days build up to it.

And so the other six days of the week for the people of faith are to be days of preparation to enter into that rest.

One day that is different, set apart, that we prepare for.

To let things... rest, to lie fallow, to heal and start over. All the cuts and bruises of life and relationships have a day to recover. Give things space, some room, to reconsider, to step back and regain perspective, to let go.

To let the mind and body rest. Giving up the frantic, giving up on getting things done, giving up on distraction and entertainment.

What restores us? What restoreth my soul?

This is the commandment that got Jesus crucified. He turned the Sabbath upside down. It was no longer the pinnacle of creation that all things uphold.

Jesus said that the sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the Sabbath.

Humanity became the pinnacle of creation.

Jesus literally turned creation upside down, or as Deacon Mary like to say, "right side up."

That is why he was crucified.

The Sabbath became a gift to humanity, the gift of being restored, born again, all the world grows young again in the Lord's sabbath rest.

Sabbath is sacrament, not commandment. It is the eternal invitation into communion.

This is where I disagree with our catechism, it makes the Sabbath another busy day, another day to be productive, another day for

spiritual achievement, “To set aside regular times for worship, prayer and the study of God’s ways.” Those are all good things, and part of a living breathing faith. But that is not Sabbath. It is not another day to get things done.

Barbara Scott, one of Grace Church’s eccentric saints who has entered into the Lord’s eternal Sabbath rest, had a saying, she told it to me many times.

“I’ve retired from being the general manager of the Universe.”

It was not a statement of apathy and indifference, but a statement of relinquishing control, and taking up trust and faith.

Relinquish suspicion, relinquishing fear, relinquishing control, and taking up trust that God really can be trusted.

It is a fearless and belligerent way to live.

It is to choose to believe.

Take a day, to rest, trusting God with the details, one day a week.

I double dog dare you.

Sabbath is the sacrament, the gift, of trust.

Be set free.

Next week the fifth and sixth words. Honor thy father and thy mother, and Thou shalt do no murder.

Speak the word that sets the world free.

Lent 3a 2023; 12 March

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### **FIVE, SIX PICK UP STICKS**

Red rover, red rover send Robert right over!

Two long lines of young people with arms and hands linked together, facing each other.

One of those brutal children’s games we used to play, one child would be called upon to leave one line, run across the field, and try to break through the linked arms on the other side.

Great fun with lots of bruises and sore arms.

We are all linked together.

Honor thy father and thy mother.

The fifth word of the decalogue.

This is the third sermon in a sermon series on the decalogue, today

Turn with me to page 848 in your Prayers Books.

Let’s read this one out loud, roman numeral VIII, in unison...

“To be honest and fair in our dealings; to seek justice, freedom, and the necessities of life for all people; and to use our talents and possessions as ones who must answer for them to God.”

Ouch.

So that is much more involved than we first thought.

Shop lifting and embezzling, that kind of thing is what usually comes to mind.

But, when I take advantage of someone else’s need or weakness for my own profit, that is stealing as well.

When I don’t share, I steal from God.

Bottom line.

When I don’t share, I steal from God.

Wealth is not a blessing, it is not an entitlement, it is not an achievement.

It is a responsibility.

It is not mine.

It is for me to pass along, it is God’s, not mine.

We are stewards of God’s abundance. Not owners.

Which is why tithing is considered the beginning of a faithful response.

We have been lied to.

We have been taught that we can own and consume whatever and whomever we choose.

That world is dead and dying.

God’s world is something else.

God gives all, has given everything, even unto death on the cross that we may live, that we may be free, that we may choose love.

The word of freedom is that the overflowing grace of God has entered and overwhelmed the world.

Therefore, I share out of thanksgiving.

Thou shalt share. Thou shalt share a lot.

Be set free, don’t be owned by ownership, don’t be possessed by possessiveness.

The word is setting us free, to be free indeed.

without sin can cast the first stone.  
Nobody took him up in the offer.  
There is something else going on here.

Adultery, like murder, begins long before the act, it begins with a poorly tended heart, a moment of weakness, and an opportunity.

In our catechism class we play a game. I read the catechism version of each of the ten commandments and the class tries to figure out which commandment it is.

The catechism simply says, "To use all our bodily desires as God intended." That's all it says. It is the shortest commandment in the catechism.

It usually takes the class a little while to figure out which commandment that is. It's a fun game.

I know, I know the things that priests do for fun...

Desire.

Do I use other people? Are they a means to an end for me?

Or, do I love and serve others, that they may be all that God intended? Blazing with glory.

Do I cultivate my heart to see and treat others like the miracle that they are?

We are all users in recovery, with broken untended hearts that are becoming whole, we are letting go of a world that is all about consuming others and being consumed, and we are being born into a new world that chooses love, that embraces the miracle that other people are, that embraces the miracle that we are.

God is known and revealed through the miracle that we all are.

Embrace the miracle.

God embraces the miracle.

Jesus is that embrace.

Be embraced.

That is the seventh word of freedom, leading us out of the house of bondage.

Embrace the miracle. Be set free.

Thou shalt embrace the miracle.

The Eighth word of liberation from the House of bondage is the word of not stealing.

Just as the seventh word is the shortest in the catechism, the eighth word is the longest.

we hear the fifth and sixth words, honoring parents, and thou shalt do no murder.

Honor thy mother and thy father, the fifth word from God setting us free from the house of bondage.

So, there is more to it than we first think.

All I have to do is be good to my parents, how hard can that be? The deeper reading of this word of liberation is that it is about authority.

We are all linked together, we all rely on the authority of others, and others rely on our authority.

When that link between us is broken, then Red Rover Red Rover, we lose each other.

The full version of this commandment shows us what authority is really about: "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

That our days may be long, that we may live, that we may flourish. When authority is betrayed or dishonored, when the link is broken, then we wither.

We all have authority to ensure that those around us flourish.

The Catechism has an interesting twist on this, to meet the "just demands" of those who are in authority. So that gets complicated when the demands are not just, because to honor authority is to hold it accountable when the demands are unjust. To honor authority is to hold authority accountable. We are all linked together by a great human chain of flourishing that connects us to God, the authority to flourish flows through the long human chain.

We see the Hebrews holding God to account in the Exodus lesson today, in their thirst, they asked is God among us or not? And the water flowed.

So, this is about more than my parents and me, more than my children and me. This is about my being connected to humanity, and will I use the life and breath that I have left to make sure that others flourish.

Will I be just? Will I make just demands? Will I hold authority accountable?

This fifth word shows us that God connects us all, that God brings flourishing, God is water in the dry places.

The sixth word of God setting us free from the house of bondage,

“Thou shalt do no murder.”

At first that seems pretty straight forward, just don't kill anybody. But Jesus makes it complicated by including, even being angry, insulting, and passing judgement.

We have to watch our hearts, because that is where murder begins.

Evidence based decision making also reveals a great deal about how murder usually happens.

In prison murderers tend to be some of the more stable inmates. Most are regular guys who had one too many bad days, and they snapped.

Murder usually involves drinking too much and having easy access to a loaded handgun, and then the wife and children, family and friends pay the price, and frequently the angry drunk gun owner takes their life as well.

We live in a time where mass shootings are on the rise, they get a lot of media attention, people whose minds and wills have been broken doing unspeakable evil, but most murders are all about family and friends and an angry drunk gun owner who had one bad day too many.

Murder begins in the heart, until one day the heart explodes.

We must tend our hearts and know our hearts.

We must cultivate hearts that have a deep reverence for life, that seek the image of God, that actively seek forgiveness, that forsakes malice, and that works tirelessly for peace.

Part of the reverence for life is to be smart.

We must be smart. Our hand guns need to be locked away, unloaded, with ammunition stored separately somewhere else. The evidence is overwhelming.

Bad days and alcohol require that we have to slow ourselves down when it comes to access to loaded hand guns.

It isn't about home invasion, or random shootings on the street, or muggings, as horrible as those are. Overwhelmingly we are our own worst enemy, we are the greatest threat to our families and friends.

We must be smart, and we must tend our hearts.

Life is sacred, life is holy, life is precious, that is what this word reveals about God, God cherishes all life, all humanity, to encounter God is to be infected with that cherishing of the miracle and mystery of other people. To murder is to deface the image of God, it is sacrilege.

Cherish each other. That is the word of liberation.

Next week the bishop will be at Grace, but only at the 10:30 liturgy. He will not be at the 8:00 liturgy.

This sermon series will continue next week only at the 8:00 liturgy. It will be available on-line for those who want to hear or read it.

Next week: the seventh and eighth words of the decalogue, thou shalt not commit adultery, and thou shalt not steal. The two that get most of our attention.

Speak the word that sets the world free.

Lent 4a 2023; 19 March

Out of the House of Bondage: Ten Words of Freedom

Jack Hardaway

## **SEVEN, EIGHT LAY THEM STRAIGHT**

Desire.

This is all about desire.

What happens when it turns inward and stagnates, and decays.

And when it looks outward and is transformed by love, when it is baptized.

This is the fourth sermon in a sermon series on the decalogue, the ten words that set world free from the house of bondage.

Today we hear the seventh and the eighth words, Thou shalt not commit adultery, and thou shalt not steal.

These two commandments take up a great deal of our attention, a never ending source of gossip and media obsession. Who knows how many books and movies and stories have the simple title of the Seventh Commandment, or the Eighth Commandment?

The seventh word, that sets us free from the house of bondage is about much more than sex, and whose sleeping with whom.

It is about desire, and what happens when it goes wrong, and what happens when it is baptized.

Adultery is the breaking of the covenant of marriage.

Just don't sleep with someone else, pretty straightforward at first glance.

Jesus goes to the heart though.

In the same passage where he says murder includes anger, insult and judgement, Jesus also expands adultery to include lust.

Which pretty much makes most of us adulterers.

In that episode when Jesus saves the woman caught in adultery from being stoned to death he defuses the situation by saying those