

Sermon    October 8, 2017    Something beautiful for the world    Cara B. Hochhalter

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20                      and                      Psalm 19

When we took some days off, we visited our daughter in New York City. She took us on a ferry across the East River from Lower Manhattan to Brooklyn, we had fish tacos on a barge; the next night she took us to Little Italy for a celebration of St. Gennaro, Patron Saint of Naples, where we strolled through blocks of food booths, lights and festivities!

While she was at work, we spent one day walking around the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They claim they have 5000 years-worth of art and culture on display... I was bowled over by the beautiful things people have been making across cultures and time... designs carved into utensils, incredible items in silver and glass, wood and stone. Not only were there beautiful images framed on the walls, but exquisite African masks, South American bowls, Native American artifacts, and Japanese baskets....all imaginatively carved and decorated and beautifully lit by this museum to highlight their beauty.

People didn't used to go to Walmart to buy their stuff...people made the things they used and decorated them with artwork that reflected their souls. It makes me appreciate the handiwork of quilt-making today and prayer shawls, and glasswork and woodworking and even cooking, but I think our consumer society has lost something by not employing the arts more in our everyday lives.

And so, I started thinking about how I might "put something of beauty out there in the world." I used to paint wildflowers, so I pulled out my watercolors and started painting and drawing some of the flowers from Kate Steven's garden where I get a farm share....one of them is on the cover today... putting something of beauty into the world...it feels like a good thing to do, especially in the midst of the tragedies that we hear about in these days and around which we all grieve.

Let us be in prayer: Creating God, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts together, be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

God put something of beauty into the world, when Moses met this Holiness on Mt. Sinai and brought back the 10 Commandments carved on stone tablets! Gary Anderson calls them "living words from God." They are rather specific and form a structure for society that leads towards....a way of living more harmoniously together.

They are all about relationship...with God and with one another. Jesus, of course, condensed them into two commandments: to love God, with everything you've got...and to love your neighbor as yourself. Marcus Borg calls these "The Two Great Relationships." Loving God and loving one another....

The first four have to do with the loving God part....telling us to: Worship God, not idols, respect this Holy name, and reserve a day for reverence and worship...the Sabbath. So we ask ourselves how are we doing on these four? There is nothing about saying certain words, or praying a particular way, or going to confession, or even saying any particular creed! I love this! The simplicity is beautiful. It is to worship God, not idols, (meaning not money or food or the Red Sox), but respecting this Holy name, and reserving some time in our busy lives...making some time for Sabbath, for worship.

How we grow in our relationship with God is open...knowing that this is a beautiful, life-long process! Are we good so far?

The last six commandments are about relationship with each other in our society: honor your parents, respect life and do not kill, honor your marriage covenants, only take what is yours, tell the truth about the people around you, and be glad when others have things that you don't. Some of these might be a little challenging...

Noticed I have turned the Ten Commandments into positive statements...

The Hebrew Scriptures are full of many other very specific laws, like not eating milk and meat together and how to tie up your donkey, but these TEN have stood out as the big ones. Can you think of others you might add for a society to run smoothly? Perhaps something about treating all people with dignity regardless of differences?

Any society needs rules...Barbara Brown Taylor says that just a promise of a good life without some laws, is like a tent without tent poles! We need some structure to hold us all up...

For me these commandments are a reminder of keeping in touch with God/Holiness... life without some sense of Holiness would be empty and cold, however it is that you relate to the spiritual side of things. And these commandments remind me of the need to respect and care for all of life, my neighbors in the whole world, to be honest and keep my priorities straight. ...it is not always easy.

Walther Brueggemann says the Commandments invite us into an identity of wonder, gratitude and obedience... In this sense, laws are made to set us free to be fully who we were meant to be knowing that no harm will be done.

But Isadora Duncan is quoted as saying, "We may not all break the Ten Commandments, but we are certainly all capable of it. Within us lurks the breaker of all laws, ready to spring out at the first real opportunity." Some people feel hemmed in by too many laws and so our society is constantly grappling with how laws should be upheld and interpreted.

The issue of gun laws is of particular importance in these days...you may have differing opinions on this. Out of the recent news, I think everyone recognizes that we need laws to keep guns out of the hands of those who are mentally unfit ... In my mind, no one on the streets needs guns that were made for war. Our laws should encourage us to keep this 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment, *thou shall not kill?* I do not understand the concept that we will be safer if everyone has a gun...that has not proven to be the case! We need more laws for gun safety.

Rumi once said, "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there."

So...my intention in the midst of controversy and tragic events, is to put something of beauty into the world. Many of you are doing this, too...whether it is through cooking or gardening or helping others or teaching or making prayer shawls or music or poetry or art...When there is such painful news, my response is not to wither in anger and hurt, but turn my creative energy towards making something beautiful for the world. How about it?

I invite you to think for a moment and name some examples of people doing just that...putting something beautiful into the world?.....(Response)

I think of Palestinians and Israelis who in the midst of hatred and conflict, started *Combatants for Peace*, I think of the Lutheran minister in Bethlehem who in spite of drastic restrictions on his people, started a college so that young people could learn, I think of the people who just won the Nobel Peace Prize, iCan: International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (Thou Shalt Not Kill!), I think of an effort called, "Hands Across the Hills" where people from Leaveritt, MA are reaching out to people from a community in Kentucky to have respectful conversations, not judging but to see the humanity of the other....putting something beautiful in our world....our choir, our sending of prayer cards, our offering food for those with limited means, how about our

trying to understand issues and working for fairness, particularly for those oppressed...our efforts to collect goods for Syrian refugees and cleaning supplies for Hurricane victims... each of the organizations that M&O supports...these are all putting beauty back into our world...right? Even smiles do it...Prayers certainly do it....acts of kindness...love, listening, sharing...

I am going to keep painting and drawing...I thought I might do one flower a day but after a two weeks, I have only made four...but it does feel good. Drawing and painting is a meditation for me...it makes me see the beauty in these natural creations...it makes me wonder, it fills me with awe...and perhaps it makes me obedient to a higher law of love in our universe.

I wonder what it would be like if we each put one thing of beauty back into the world every day, even in spite of the news we hear ... !

Amen.