

“Go Down Moses” AND “More Than Comfort Food” Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20  
St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV World Communion Sunday (October 5,) 2014

<sup>1</sup>Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

- 1.** <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me.
- 2.** <sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth
- 3.** <sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
- 4.** <sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work.
- 5.** <sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
- 6.** <sup>13</sup> You shall not murder.
- 7.** <sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.
- 8.** <sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.
- 9.** <sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- 10.** <sup>17</sup> You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

<sup>18</sup> When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.”<sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.”

Good morning, Church. Today begins a sermon series for the month of October, that I affectionately call “**All Moses, All The Time.**” Now, there are some people I know who are not enamored with the First Testament, because it seems like the OLD Testament to them. They feel like the NEW Testament is what Christians ought to be studying all the time. So the notion of **All Moses, All The Time** is disconcerting.

That’s why we have my assistant for this sermon series [point to a male mannequin clothed in just a baby bonnet and a diaper] whose name is Manny Kinn. Manny, in his baby bonnet and diaper represents the very young nation of Israel.

These law books represent what is necessary for young ones, in this stage of development.

In the early stages of human development, it is important for parents and teachers, and indeed all of us as the congregation, who participate in the liturgy of infant baptism, when we promise to do all we can to raise a child properly – to have BLACK AND WHITE principles – foundations for living, to form their basic world view.

Life will surely get complicated, and make living seem less black and white – with issues like abortion, stem-cell research, war, capital punishment, and a host of other issues over which there is debate and disagreement. But people cannot begin to wrestle with those tough issues unless they have the foundations of BLACK AND WHITE upon which to base their discussion and decisions. Not even Paul's discussion of how we are released from the Law, in the New Testament, makes any sense until we first know the Law of the First Testament.

THE CHILDREN MUST BE TAUGHT THE BASICS!

MANNY KIN needs to be brought up in a world of BLACK AND WHITE in order to function in a complicated world, which he will begin to encounter in his middle school years. But we will get to that later on. Today, MANNY is still in baby bonnet and diaper.

Let's look at the BLACK AND WHITE principles that were given to the infant nation of Israel, in the form of TEN COMMANDMENTS.

These Ten Commandments have in recent years engendered a lot of public attention, and even litigation, over their place in the world today. One Judge in Georgia insisted that he had the right to post them in large form in his courtroom, and was willing to lose his judgeship over this issue. One of his supporters, Georgia Representative Lynn Westmoreland, agreed to be interviewed on comedian Stephen Colbert's television show. When Colbert asked him to name the commandments, he looked stricken. He finally came up with "don't lie" and "don't steal," but after that had to wave a white flag: "I can't think of any more."

Then Colbert asked him if he couldn't think of a better place to post the Ten Commandments than in the courthouse. Westmoreland said, he couldn't think of any better place.

Public Radio comedian Michael Feldman suggested that the millions of dollars spent on all that litigation could have been saved the tax payers, AND the same public good accomplished if the Ten Commandments were posted someplace that Representative Westmoreland would not, at least did not, do: **IN EACH PERSON'S MEMORY.**

If we had children in Church on Sunday School on Sunday mornings instead of all the other places that we allow them to go, then we could certainly do that job better.

But, let me not get distracted preaching to the choir on this issue. Westmoreland and Colbert and Feldman help me illustrate the point I want to make on these BIG TEN today – **the importance of MEMORY.** If you look at them, one thing is pretty noticeable: HOW MANY OF THE COMMANDMENTS ARE “YOU SHALL NOT” statements.

One sticks out as an anomaly: it is not a ‘YOU SHALL NOT’ statement, although it COULD HAVE BEEN written in that form:

Number FOUR: (verse 8) **REMEMBER the sabbath day, and keep it holy.**

Funny isn't it. A commandment that isn't “You shall not” but “Remember” and **it is the one that we seem to have the hardest time remembering.**

These commandments FOLLOW the blessing of RELEASE FROM CAPTIVITY AND THE MIRACULOUS ESCAPE THROUGH THE RED SEA.

It is not, as some suggest, FOLLOW THE LAW AND YOU WILL BE BLESSED. Rather, the order of things in God's Kingdom is reversed. GOD BLESSES YOU FIRST BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING. After that, comes the gift of the commandments as a prescription for good living, that God's blessing enables you to do.

**REMEMBER.**

The Greek word used in our Holy Communion liturgy is **ANAMNESIS** – it comes from “an” or “Don’t” and **amnesis** the root word for “**Amnesia.**” So Anamnesis = **DON’T HAVE AMNESIA.**

...the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in anamnesis of me.” In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in anamnesis of me.” (I Corinthians 11.23-25)

**Don’t have amnesia. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.**

I recently reviewed a book on the religions of India, co-edited by Belu Nunley’s cousin. One line caught my attention. Immediately after naming the NINE religions practiced in India, the author of the article noted:

**They all teach the same principle: surrender to the divine with total belief.**

It seemed obvious to me that so long as we practice amnesia, and do not Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, then we aren’t in keeping with the basic premise of nine of the world’s living religions, including Christianity and Judaism.

**Don’t have amnesia. Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy.**

- Remember that God made us and gave us a prescription for living the way the Designer knows it is to be lived.
- There is a God and it is not me. There is more important stuff in life than in working and accumulating.
- Do what I can in six days and leave some room for God’s involvement.
- Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Not just to jump through a God-hoop, but in order to live life the way God created it to be lived.

If we remember this, then all the other commandments are so much the easier to “NOT.”

**There is a God and it is not me.**

The rest of our homily on REMEMBERING will come during the liturgy of Holy Communion. Let us continue now in worship today with the presentation of our Tithes and Offerings.

**MEDITATION #1** (following CONFESSION ABSOLUTION & PASSING OF PEACE)

Today, I will interrupt our liturgy to share with you some of the reasons why Holy Communion is so special to me, and has been so special to Christians, especially those of the Wesleyan tradition, throughout the centuries.

Holy Communion is a **SACRED MEMORY** of Jesus' final meal with his Apostles prior to the Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Apostles didn't understand it then, but when looking back on it, they were able to see what it was all about.

Our liturgy says, "Do this in remembrance of Me."

Or, as we heard earlier: Do this in *anamnesis* of Me.

In the tenth book of his **Confessions**, St. Augustine discusses memory. He notes that actual events do not live in our mind, only what we remember of them – amazing the psychological insight of someone 1500 years before the birth of Sigmund Freud! How we hold the past in the treasure trove of our memory is indeed "the past" for us.

And Jesus, that greatest of psychologists (no surprise, since He created all of the parts involved) was able to give these first disciples a gift, which would change the pain and sorrow of His Passion and Crucifixion into something beautiful. By the Gift of this Memorial Service of the Last Supper, something ugly and terrible was transformed into something exquisite. **Do this in remembrance of Me.**

Have you ever heard of the term "**Comfort Food**"? Comfort Food is the meal that your mother brought you when you were sick, as a child. For me, it's Tomato Soup and Egg Salad Sandwiches. What is YOUR comfort food? And, now -- even today, when you eat that same food, does your mind and heart go back to those days when your mother lovingly cared for you in your time of sickness.

Jesus knew -- and the disciples would later come to know -- just how much pain they would have each time they remembered these last few hours together. So He gave them this Last Supper to be a **comfort food** to them -- each and every time that they shared it, they would remember -- not just the pain, but the comfort -- of his compassion.

With this precious gift from Jesus to His Disciples and to us, we are reminded each time we share -- reminded of His Friendship ... with them and with us, and with all who call upon Him as the Source of Life and of Strength -- FOREVER.

**MEDITATION #2** (Interjected into the GREAT THANKSGIVING, after these words: *Pour out Your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, that we may be for all the world the Body of Christ redeemed by His Blood.* )

A Memorial Service -- yes ... and more!

Comfort Food -- yes ... and more!

Yes, much more. You see, it is the doctrine and belief of our Church that *by the Words of Jesus Himself*, This IS My Body and This IS My Blood, that when we gather around the Lord's Table for Holy Communion, this Bread [LIFT UP] and this Fruit of the Vine [LIFT UP] are transformed ***IN A SPIRITUAL SENSE*** into the actual Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

When I stand before you and hold the bread and cup up -- I stand in a line of succession from Jesus. The hands laid upon my head at ordination were from the Bishops whose heads had hands laid upon them by another bishop, who had hands laid upon his head by another all the way back to those apostles who witnessed Jesus doing the same thing, and who received from him the bread and wine, and were told *This is My Body* and *This is My Blood*. Each ordained clergy who serves you, does so in Apostolic Succession -- as the Vicar (or stand in) for Christ Himself.

And when you receive, you feel the touch of another hand upon yours. It's a human touch -- that's what Jesus was and is all about -- God with us -- Emmanuel -- God in human flesh.

How did it happen -- God in human flesh? It's a miraculous mystery. Most people call it *Virgin Birth*. But none can explain HOW it worked.

How do this bread and wine spiritually turn into the Body and Blood of Jesus? It's a holy mystery. None can explain it. But we believe that it is as real as Jesus said it is.

**This IS my Body; this IS my Blood.**

You receive Holy Communion, and Jesus is once more here -- touching your hand -- your lips -- and Jesus enters you to feed you as miraculously as he fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish.

*Do it too often and it is not special* -- this is what I have heard some people say. And I say, "True, but ONLY if you receive it as nothing more than a memorial service." Does praying lose its special meaning if we do it too often? Does worship lose its meaning if we do it too often? Then how can Jesus actually being here and touching us become un-special by doing it too often?

And then I think upon the Purpose of this Holy Meal --

- it's NOT just to make us feel good -- although it does.
- It's not just so we can get so close to Jesus as to touch Him -- although we do.
- It's more -- it's to nourish us.... for a very important task.

We -- you and I -- have been chosen to be the Body of Christ in the world -- NOT just believers -- NOT just followers -- NOT just honest-do-gooders

We are the Body of Christ -- redeemed sinners -- to reconcile and heal a hurting world.

- For such a task
- For such a calling
- We need Holy Food.

It's ordinary bread and grape juice -- but spiritually transformed into Jesus' Body and Blood.

In order that ordinary folks -- even some who have sinned a whole lot -- may be transformed into Christ's Body.

It's a mystery why God works this way -- BUT GOD DOES.

And it's a miracle. But this **IS** what God does. Thanks be to God.

**MEDITATION #3** (Interjected into the GREAT THANKSGIVING, after these words: *By Your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and we feast together with all the saints at His heavenly banquet. Through Your Son Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit in and through Your holy Church, all honor and glory is Yours, Almighty God, now and for ever. AMEN.*)

One month from today -- the first Sunday of November -- we celebrate ALL SAINTS' DAY. It's a special high and holy celebration for us here at St. Marks, as we are able to envision those saints. I can close my eyes now and see all those banners of those saints -- on the altar rail, on the walls, throughout the balcony -- all the saints who have gone on before, and who made the sacrifices and contributions that made it possible for us to be here today. But their work was not completed.

Paul says in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Hebrews that their work is not made complete except in and through us. So that great cloud of witnesses is there cheering us on -- so that the work of Christ begun in them will be made complete in us. They are all at the banquet table cheering us on, and awaiting our arrival at that banquet table with them

There's no finer image for me to hold onto, than the heavenly banquet I'm going to eat someday.

Jesus loved to eat with folks -- so much so that He ate with sinners -- otherwise He would have had to always eat alone.

But there's going to be another bigger dinner. And at the table are going to be **Jesus**, and **Peter, Paul & Mary** (the original ones) and **St. Francis**, and **John & Charles Wesley**, and **my grandparents**, too, -- even my grandfather that I never met - - and can you think of who else will be there -- can you think of others ... name them in your hearts now **[SILENCE]**

Well, today is an appetizer course -- we get just a taste when we feed on Jesus, of that great banquet. They're all there now -- and sometimes when I close my eyes, I can picture them there.

And sometimes -- I can even hear them -- not just the sounds of their eating and singing and laughing -- but also their cheering -- **cheering us on**.

We heard these words: *Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, with Your Holy Spirit in and through Your Holy Church. ...*

**Holy Church** -- that's not just us -- it's the whole great cloud of witnesses who have gone on before us. Today, we touch and share in Holy Food, just as the saints did while walking on earth. And we are connected with them in this meal to the great banquet they've just begun. And when they've been there 10,000 years, they've just begun. Now that's a banquet! And in less time than that, we can join with them again, for all eternity.

The Kingdom of God -- announced by Jesus -- **WAS** and **SHALL EVERMORE BE** -- and is **PRESENT RIGHT NOW**.

God's Holy Church **WAS** and **SHALL EVERMORE BE** -- and we are invited to join **RIGHT NOW** in this Holy Appetizer course.

These are some of the reasons why I love Holy Communion. I thank God for this wonderful and mysterious gift that gives me the comfort and memories of THE PAST: Jesus' meal with His disciples -- that makes Jesus Christ my Lord PRESENT here and now -- and that celebrates a **glorious YET-TO-COME** -- past, present, and future: all at the same time. Thanks be to God. Amen.