

“You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor’s Toys”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

World Communion Sunday, Season of Pentecost, October 2,
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Exodus 20: 1-17 -- The Ten Commandments

Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ 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. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth

generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 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.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 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.

God is still God.

Welcome, friends, to the First Christian Church and
Community

Park and Playground.

Jay Norton and David Andrew were out here repairing park
benches.

Jay was painting a bench when a 4-year-old walked by
and asked his mom what they were doing.

She explained it to him, and they moved on.

A few minutes later the boy came back, and said to Jay, *“I see
you are still at it.”*

“Yes, sir,” said Jay.

The boy said, *“If you need any help, let me know.”*

He pointed to the red swing set and said, *“I’ll be right over there.”*

Our red swing set is in motion every day, all day, 365 days a year,

and has been for over 10 yrs.

Those swings should be listed in the Guinness Book of World Records.

This park has positively served

to change the shape and sounds of our fair city.

The fact that several hundred folks are here every week, week in and week out,

has drawn new businesses and helped make this area vibrant and alive.

Ask Farm Burger, Fleet Feet, Dancing Goats coffee shop, or any realtor.

Home values are up and family values are evident.

This park is a delightful, visible, tangible manifestation

of divine hospitality and grace.

The other day I welcomed some families to the church park,

and a woman said, *“Oh, I’m not from around here.”*

I asked her, “*Where are you from?*” imagining Cleveland or Chicago.

She said, “*Atlanta Station.*”

Well, whether you travel six miles or six blocks or six houses to be here,

everybody is welcome.

How many playgrounds do you know that have so many affectionate nicknames?

Decatur Toy Park -- Toddler Park -- The Park of Misfit Toys

Some folks may want to call it *mine*.

Yet when we bring our children to this sacred space and safe place,

their behavior testifies that it’s not “mine” but rather “ours”.

Consider the toys.

Here we have a living model of how not to covet our neighbor’s toys.

From Little Tykes to little trucks to little cabins in the woods,

every toy in the park is a gift of love,

a loving example of sharing unconditionally,

of giving without any strings attached.

Two or three times a year church and community get together to clean up,

to have a carnival, grill hot dogs, to share our stories,

to remove broken or damaged or duplicate toys,

and soon after more toys are given to be shared.

Adults, we have much to learn from our children.

Watch how they interact.

Enjoy how our kids treat other and play.

With joy, with a smile, with energy and enthusiasm,

they get back up after being knocked down or pushed aside,

brush themselves off,

help each other back up,

check in with mom or dad or a nanny,

get a sip of juice and a cracker,

and then go back into the hard work of good play.

Sounds like fun.

Sounds like First Christian Church of Decatur to me.

We unite to serve, we agree to disagree,

we encourage one another, we resolve to love,

we gather for prayer and to share our stories,

we partake of the Living Cup and break
Bread together,

and then, recharged and reenergized and renewed,

we go forth to work hard, play fair, to share and
be the Good News.

Whether in the park or at home or in the wider community,

there are basic rules of ethical interaction

and living in community.

We call the true source of the rules and roles and relationships
holy.

We choose to identify the source as a mighty and loving Spirit,

one whose will is for justice, for community, for
kindness and grace.

Into a fragmented and broken world God sends love.

During World War II

the Japanese army invaded the city of Yangcheng in China.

In the city of Yangcheng was a Christian missionary named Gladys Aylward.

Gladys Aylward needed to flee for her own life and safety,

but she could not bear to leave her life's work behind.

You see, she and her assistant managed an orphanage of over 100 children.

So Gladys and her assistant began to lead more than 100 children

over the mountains toward Free China.

During their journey away from violence and through unspeakable hardship,

Gladys grappled with despair as never before.

After passing a sleepless night,

she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety.

A 13-year-old girl reminded Gladys of the much-loved, often-told tale

of Moses and the Israelites and their Exodus,

their journey from slavery and violence

into wilderness hardships

as they moved toward the

Promised Land.

Gladys said, *“But I am not Moses!”*

“Of course you aren’t Moses!” the girl said, *“but God is still God!”*

In time, Gladys and the children all made it through to safety,
and they remembered again and again

of life, that no matter what befalls us on our journeys

our glory, regardless of our feelings of adequacy,

our fears, our challenges, our
accomplishments,

God is still God.

When Moses and Aaron and the Elders and People of Israel

walked in the wilderness, moving away from Egypt,

away from slavery and oppression and violence,

they came to Mount Sinai.

Mount Sinai, the mountain of God,

is the sacred place where God spoke to Moses,

who stood as the representative of the whole people of God.

While Moses spoke to God face to face,

the people saw God hidden in the cloud that descended on the mountain

and heard the voice of God in the thunder

and felt the presence of God in the earthquake.

Then God gave the Ten Commandments to Moses to give to the people.

The Ten Commandments are set in the context of God's redemptive purpose,

of God's liberating love and saving grace.

In and of themselves these commandments do not save;

they are not a weapon to be used over and against another soul;

their purpose is to show us the life that God expects of us.

They show us our ethical borders and boundaries.

They show us how to walk the walk and talk the talk.

Recently *The New Yorker* magazine ran a cartoon
that depicted Moses reciting the Ten Commandments
to an audience of Isrealites.

Moses said, "*Thou shalt not create graven images, Ira.*

*Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain. Still
looking at you, Ira.*

*Thou shalt keep holy the Sabbath. You getting
this, Ira?"*

[Published in *The New Yorker* 4/18/2011, by Paul Noth]

The Word of the Lord is personal – *you getting this, Ira?* -- and
it is communal.

The love of God is given to you, and to you, and to you, and to
all of us together.

God is still God.

In Martin Luther's book, Small Catechism,

Luther points out that the first commandment,

"You shall have no other gods." is really the
only commandment.

All the rest, says Luther, are illustrations of what it means
to “*fear, love, and trust God above all things.*”

We are to mobilize our entire lives around one true loyalty.

If God is our God, then we will naturally obey all other
commandments.

If God is our God, then we will revere the Lord’s name.

If God is our God, we will be delighted and eager

to hear and learn the Word of the Lord,

to honor our parents and elders,

avoid harming our neighbor,

love and honor our spouse and companion,

help our neighbors improve their income and
property,

and help our neighbors keep what is
rightfully theirs.

God is still God.

Jesus Christ interpreted the Law of Moses in the best of lights.

Christ called to the Disciples then and today to take positive
action,

to revere and honor God,
and to assist our neighbors in the conduct of
their lives.

Christ sent the Holy Spirit to be with us, to guide us and
intercede for us

with sighs too deep for words.

The Holy Spirit then breathed life into the Church,

to help us to work and play, serve and pray together

in God's garden and city, in the parks and
playgrounds of life.

God is still God.

A banker and a farmer in Texas held the following
conversation.

The farmer came into the bank and told the banker

he had some good news and some bad news.

The banker said, "Well, let's hear the bad news first."

*"Okay, you know that crop loan I've taken out every year for
the last 10?"*

"Yes," said the banker.

*"Well, I can't pay it back. And you know the mortgage I have
on my land?"*

“Yes,” said the banker.

“Well, I can’t pay that either. And you know all money I borrowed

to pay for tractors and other equipment?”

“Yes,” said the banker.

“They are all yours.” There was a moment of silence.

Then the banker said, “What is the good news?”

The farmer smiled, and said,

“I came in to tell you that I am going to keep banking with you.”

The Good News, my friends, is that God is still God.

God is still banking on the human race.

God is still God, still loving us, still calling us, still inviting us

“to love the Lord your God

with all your heart and with all your soul

and with all your strength and with all your mind,

and to love your neighbor as

yourself.” (Luke 10: 27)

All power be to the Creator, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material:

God knows that there are other gods.

This first, primary command of God

recognizes that while there are other gods,

they are not to receive our loyalty nor our allegiance.

There are other gods, competing, rival, conflicting gods.

Israel, says the Lord, is to have nothing to do with them!

Today these other gods are not called Baal;

they are called destructive “isms”...

-- consumerism, racism, sexism, ageism, nationalism, narcissism.

Heaven knows we get distracted, misguided and lost following other gods.

Lord knows we give energy and resources and air time to other gods,

but with this command we are liberated,

freed from the bondage of distracting
compromise.

In the Law of Moses there is grace to be freed from captivity

to be able to worship and trust the one True God,

whose name is above all other names

and who calls you into a life of meaning
and hope.