

“The other five?”

Thoughts offered by Deborah and Dennis Stauffer on July 10, 2010

Marsha Brumbaugh asked for members of the congregation to tell their story. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, after 40 years of marriage, our story falls somewhere between the Rocky Horror Picture Show and Love Story. I, of course, am played by the handsome Ryan O’Neal.

One of the things that I learned over the years is to never take to the podium after a speaker who is more eloquent, better prepared, and has a better message than you do. Unfortunately Deb and I are going to follow the wonderful sermon Elizabeth Kachline gave last Sunday. We hope we can offer something worthwhile for you to consider.

I know many of you have seen the movie by Mel Brooks “History of the World Part 1.” One scene from this 1981 farce is the inspiration for our presentation this morning. For those of you who may not have had the opportunity of viewing this movie, let me relate the scene to you. Better yet, let your mind visualize the happenings as I describe them to you.

Picture Moses, with robe and beard flowing, descending from Mt. Sinai with three large, heavy stone tablets. The Israelites gather below as he nears the bottom. As the multitude looks up to him, Moses drops one of the tablets, and it shatters. Thus, ten, not 15, commandments are delivered to the assembled crowd.

I know it’s a stretch, and just slightly sacrilegious, but if you could replace the missing five commandments, what would they be? There’s nothing wrong with the first ten you understand. The ten laws of God have worked well for thousands of years, but what would you add if you had the chance? What would your “other five” be? So, this morning, Deb and I would like to share with you our “five missing commandments.”

Number 11: Thou Shalt Do

Helen Keller wrote, “I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. And, because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do the something that I can do.” We each can do the something for which we have skills, talents, and opportunities. Right now, our church is facing a challenge. It is up to each of us to do our share. Things will not be as smooth as they once were. That’s the challenging part. What we have to do is see the opportunity and go for it! We all know that anything worth having is worth the sacrifice. Winston Churchill’s words are worth remembering as we walk through these days and weeks of the unknown. He said, “If you’re going through hell, keep going.”

We must walk toward our goals firmly and with conviction, taking bold steps and leaving the past behind. We must walk our talk. We must keep the light of all that we are

illuminated so that we, and others watching, will see our bold steps, realize our emphatic convictions, and understand our direction. Let us embrace Hubert Humphrey's words, "The test we must set for ourselves is not to march alone but to march in such a way that others want to join us."

We are very fortunate to have been friends with Norm Vaughn whom I'm sure you remember as an adventurer. He traveled to the South Pole with Admiral Byrd and was an Iditarod musher here in Alaska. We enjoyed having Norm stop by our workplaces for coffee, having him in our home for fish fries, and camping with him in Hope and along Quartz Creek. One of Norm's favorite sayings was "Dream big and dare to fail." Norm believed that life was an adventure and that is how he lived it. We can all learn from Norm. It's not a matter of "just do it" like the Nike commercials assert. It's a matter of doing our work in such a way as to please God. As said in Proverbs 16: 3, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed."

By focusing our direction on what we know is right, we have nothing to fear. We must continue to listen to each other, pray for guidance, and walk the path Jesus laid for us. Kahlil Gibran said in his book The Prophet, "You are good when you strive to give of yourself. And when you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, and to one another, and to God." Maybe we should add to Norm's credo - Dream big, dare to fail, and please God.

## Number 12: Thou Shalt Apologize

Wrongdoing is an affront to the person we wrong and to the honor of God. Apologizing, or atoning, originally referred to reconciliation. Two people split apart, but then they are reconciled; they atone, and become "at one" again. How is this accomplished? Well, in human relationships, the guilty party has to somehow pay for the sin through apologizing, making up for it, or simply accepting his or her punishment.

The same might be true when we do something against God's laws. We believe that reconciling with God means paying for our wrongdoing by asking for forgiveness. It's our way to make up with God. In this light, all of our spiritual study, our meditations, our daily good thoughts and good deeds; add up to a single, massive attempt to apologize, to atone, and to be "at-one."

Be relieved though—the wiping away of our wrongdoings occurs when we realize that our split with God was never real in the first place. Nothing ever happened to our relationship with God. The only split that occurred was between our image of ourselves and our behaviors, and our image of God. The important message is that the split occurred only in our own mind, not in God's. Our real self and the real God are always completely at peace and are one from the very beginning and forever. We never leave God's loving arms.

Let me share with you the three lessons about apologizing we learned between our "Love Story" and our "Rocky Horror Picture Show." First, apologizing takes practice. It gets

easier to apologize when we do it often. When we open our heart and apologize, our hearts becomes bigger. The more we apologize, the more aware we are of the small indiscretions we do. The words “I’m sorry” come more quickly and with more sincerity. Second, we can’t control the outcome of our apology. It’s sort of like fishing. Just because we throw our line out, we don’t know if a fish will take the bait. Offering an apology doesn’t necessarily mean the offense will be forgotten, even if it is forgiven. And last, perhaps most importantly, we are more vulnerable when we apologize. Our apology doesn’t mean everything is settled. Our wrong can’t be undone. What apologizing does is tie up the loose strings so that our life together goes on. Our job is to learn and to live lovingly in our ongoing story.

### Number 13: Thou Shalt not Judge

We should worry more about our own actions and not others’. In Matthew 7:1-2, “Do not judge, that you be not judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” We judge anyway. We like to label others; put them in boxes. We don’t like “undefined” people. We make judgments based on our observations and interactions. Judging makes us feel safe and comfortable because we’ve “defined” a person, and, because we have that definition, we know how to act accordingly. This gives us a sense of control. We probably can trace this judging behavior back to primal days when we needed to make snap judgments of other people in terms of whether or not they posed a threat. The obvious reason not to judge is that we don’t know their whole story.

I am reminded of the words from a children’s song by Peter, Paul and Mary. The words to the song “Inside” go like this —

“Let’s say you’re at a pie contest.  
Let’s say that you’re the judge.  
There’s lemon and lime and watermelon rind and one that looks like fudge.  
You can’t tell which one you like the best if you only eat the crust.  
In order to complete the test, a bite of filling is a must.  
Inside, that’s the most important part.  
Inside, that’s the place you’ve got to start.  
Inside, that’s where you’ll find the heart of the matter.”

Good words to think about. It is so simple a child can do it. Really. It is the heart that matters.

Instead of judging others, just accept. Acceptance is the key. Accept that everyone has a story and, without knowing the whole story, our judgments rest on faulty foundations. When we stop judging others and are accepting, we become less critical in all aspects of our lives.

## Number 14: Thou Shalt Rejoice

In First Thessalonians 5:16, we are told to “be joyful always.” Science has proven that “laughter is the best medicine.” Joy and humor contribute to our overall physical and mental wellbeing. It’s the best way to de-stress. Most sources agree with the fact that children laugh more than 300 times a day; adults, less than 20. Why is that? Well, children laugh unconditionally whereas adults need a reason.

Work places, media sources, and life in general cause adults to face challenges of the day, tragedies, and life’s seriousness. Psalms 16:8-9 says that because God is with us, we don’t have to stress but can rejoice. Some 70 percent of illnesses have some relation to stress. High blood pressure, heart disease, depression, insomnia, anxiety, and ulcers are a few. King Solomon might have summarized it best when he wrote these words in Proverbs 17:22, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.”

Instead of the perpetual rat race, we need to ensure a values-based life; a life that we embrace fully; a life that causes general happiness and joy. How many days go by where you’ve worked from morning until too late and you are past tired? Then, you repeat that routine the following day. That day becomes more days and then it becomes weeks. You’re so busy with so many commitments that you take no time for yourself, the people you love, or activities that will bring you joy. When you look at your calendar, it should not only include your commitments but also the activities that bring you happiness. Surround yourself with people who are joyful and create environments that are happy. Dennis and I often say that the snakes want us in the same pit they’re in. We refuse to go. Think about that.

Sure, some things happen that mask our joy but there are three ways that will help to keep joy in the forefront. First, remember that God loves us unconditionally. Second, walk your Christian talk and stay busy doing good deeds. Doing good works for others helps us deal with our own stressors and we become happy as a result. Third, trust in the people you love, and in God. Where there is trust, peace and harmony prevail. We must remember the words from Proverbs 17:22 and to listen for God’s voice saying, “Rejoice, a joyful heart is the best medicine.”

## Number 15: Thou shalt keep quiet if there is nothing nice to say

Confucius said, “Silence is the true friend that never betrays.” Many of us have probably been told by our parents that before we say anything about others, we should consider whether we would say it in person. If the answer is no, we shouldn’t say it at all. In today’s world of technical gadgets, it has become easier to say things anonymously. Whether we’re gossiping or sending Instant Messages, we should consider our words. Hold back your complaints and criticisms; no matter how justified you think they might be. There possibly is something you don’t know or don’t understand completely.

Living the Christian life comes down to how well we get along with other people. We are

God's chosen ones, holy and beloved. We must demonstrate our Christian love by binding together in perfect harmony through our words. Deb and I have modified the "sticks and stones" idiom by remembering that unkind words and gossip will always hurt.

In the Gospel today, Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." John 15:10 goes further when it states, "if you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love."

That's a strong promise. The ten commandments are not multiple choices. We are to keep all of them in order to stay in God's grace. The "other five" Dennis and I presented- Thou shalt do, thou shalt apologize, thou shalt not judge, thou shalt rejoice, and thou shalt keep quiet if there is nothing nice to say – are discussed in the Bible, even though we thought they were our own idea! We live by these values in our life. Some people have a solid set of values that they never use; I guess they don't want to break up the set.

We'd like you to think about your "other five" this week. Put the commandments and the values you add to the list in action. Don't keep them on the shelf as a "solid set." Use them constantly. Live fully and completely in God's abiding love.

Amen