First United Methodist Church of Springboro

Dr. Suzanne Allen

September 27, 2015

Series: Big Ten+

Message: Be Reconciled

Scripture: Exodus 20:13, Matthew 5:21-24, 43-48

Today’s commandment in our Big 10+ playbook is “Do not kill.” Short, direct, to the point, clear, “fundamental, universal, and obvious, without debate” (Miller).

We’re all for the 10 Commandments and what they stand for until we hold them up to our culture and our lives. And then we start to squirm a little, sweat a little, argue with them…

All the excepts start coming to mind, the yes, buts… Yes the commandment is very clear God, but what about just war and the death penalty, and self-defense and the bad guys and when I’m scared or uncomfortable with someone’s differences, or they have something I really want, or really need, or they made me mad or they didn’t do what I wanted them too.

The list can go on and on and it becomes a slippery slope, doesn’t it. It reminds me of the billboard that was around a few years ago that said, “What part of do not kill” don’t you understand?

We as human beings like to argue with the rules, to push the boundaries, to find exceptions.

This commandment pushes us to examine all of those exceptions and excuses and buts that we so easily come up with, and to examine our hearts and our culture that is growing more and more violent and more and more inclined to disregard this particular commandment.

Let’s think about football for a minute. Football has lots of rules. The rules are there to keep the game moving, so that everyone understands what is happening. The rules keep the players and fans safe and make the game fun.

Every once in a while there is an agreement that exceptions can be made, but only after they are thought through and reviewed and shared with everyone. The changes cannot compromise the integrity of the game or the safety of the players, the refs, or the fans.

If there are too many exceptions made and they are made without proper consideration, it becomes very difficult to play the game with any fairness and the game becomes confusing, dangerous and not much fun.

Do not kill is at the heart of the rules for the game of life. When that rule gets changed too quickly, when exceptions are made too carelessly or selfishly, things quickly become confusing and dangerous. We begin to live in fear, defensively. We are never at our best when we are living like that.

The commandment “Do not kill” reminds us that life is not ours to take. Life belongs to God.

To take another’s life so easily, to demand the right to take another’s life, is to put ourselves in the place of God. When we do this, we’re back to commandment #1, you shall have no other god’s before me and you’re jumping into the next commandment, “Don’t steal.”

Joan Chittister puts it this way, “By using violence to stop violence, only new violence can possibly be created. And so we become blood thirsty in the name of goodness and God. We must choose carefully the kinds of power we opt to exercise….the problem is that power, ruthlessly employed, carelessly administered, often masked as virtue, often wantonly destroys in its determination to do good.”

Now some will use examples of violence in the OT as support to kill others. But when we look to the NT, we don’t find any killing or instructions to kill. We find this commandment lived out at every level. The disciples become martyrs rather than killing others in defense or revenge. They follow the example of Jesus who did not start a war, but who won the victory by taking up the cross.

And so in Matthew we hear Jesus’ teaching on this commandment: You have heard it said, do not murder. But I say, do not let anger cause you to act in harmful ways. When it wells up in you, find a way to deal with it before it escalates and causes you and others more problems.

In Ephesians 4:26, we’re instructed, “In your anger, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

In other words, live in a way that you deal with your fears and anger and frustration well before you have your finger on a trigger, before you even think of than as an option.

Not only do not kill, but in that moment when you find anger taking over and causing you to say the meanest most hurtful thing you can say, or you find yourself responding in physical violence, pushing or throwing things or hitting, realize you’re in dangerous territory. Get a hold of it now, and resolve it.

If you don’t, things can escalate quickly and it will cost you. There is always a trail of hurt and destruction of emotional and physical and spiritual cost when we don’t.

Patrick Miller puts it this way: “Restricting this commandment to acts of killing, intentional or unintentional is too limiting. Protection of life involves the heart as well as the hand. Such protection begins before the hand is lifted as one learns control of one’s attitudes and feelings and develops ways of dealing with them other than hostile acts against the person who may have inspired anger or hatred.”

In this series, nearly every week we have come back to the fact that God doesn’t care nearly as much about the rules as relationships—God’s with us and ours with each other.

In this case, the rule, “do not kill,” is the minimum. But like any parent, God’s hope is that we as his children will not only not kill each other, but treat each other with respect, and dignity…that we would even love each other.

It’s like when your parents would go out and leave an older sibling in charge and their final words would be, “Just don’t kill each other.” They don’t mean everything else leading up to that point is okay. What they are trusting you to do is to take care of each other.

God is the same. God longs for us not only to not kill, but to protect, honor, and sustain life for all and at all ages.

Chittister challenges us with this statement: “When we are not actively working to sustain life, all of life anywhere, we are actively undermining life everywhere.”

So Jesus urges us to be reconciled—to make things right with others before our anger causes bitterness, destruction, and regret.

Who in your life do you need to be reconciled with? Where are you finding anger and bitterness and regret creeping in? What do you need to do to make things right with them?

We start with those we have some relationship with—family members and co-workers and neighbors. But then we’re challenged to consider those out there whom we consider our enemies. Jesus reminds us that we are children of God and that we should therefore act like it. God loves and cares for and forgives those who are evil.

Who are those we would like to see killed? We’d like to kill even if we’d never really do it? How can we begin to see them as God sees them? How can we be reconciled to them?

This commandment and Jesus’ words push us to reflect and pray over these questions, to determine, “when, if ever, heaven will not weep over a disregard of life.” It invites us to be humble around the questions, to approach them without anger or pride, never glorifying killing or death, but when the question of taking life is raised, to weep with heaven and to long for the day when God’s Kingdom will be fully realized and we will all live in a way that we never even have to ask the questions.

And as a way of following God’s word and Jesus’ example, may we not kill, may we love, and be reconciled even when it’s hard. May we trust that God uses our faithful witness “as a means of carving out a little piece of enemy territory for the Kingdom.” (Willimon/Hauerwas.”