

Commandments for a Quiet Crisis -- Steve Ritchey
Bountiful Community Church – April 27th, 2008

Now, if I might ask, everybody take a deep breath. Let's breathe in..., and out. Breathe in, ...and out. Did you see it? You probably didn't because it's invisible. It's odorless, but we know it's there; it's like the spirit of God that we heard about in the scripture, that was just read. But it's actually there among us; it's that gas that we just heard a little bit about in the children's chat, carbon dioxide. But something's very much different about it because now we have too much of it. And **we know this is true**; we've been hearing a lot of reports and we understand that something is happening. And sometimes we don't know exactly who to believe or where to turn to when we get information on something like that. Sometimes things are not quite as they seem. I'll give you a good example that I hadn't planned on, but if you'll turn to your bulletin and look at the front cover. It looks perfectly reasonable, doesn't it? Ice waves on Lake Huron. This is, in fact, taken in Antarctica. It's a very interesting thing that people have found this photo from Antarctica and are saying global cooling has started in the Great Lakes. And you can verify this photo's source on the Snopes website, as my wife actually did, when we had received it last month in an email from my father... who'd received it from a scientist he had worked with many years ago.... at an oil company! So it's interesting the information that we sometimes get that seems quite reasonable. It's perfectly understandable that this would be on the cover; but in fact, it is not true information.

But who can we turn to? Who can we look to when we're talking about scientific things? How about a body of greater scientists that many received Nobel prizes, that the United Nations selected in 2005? 1400 scientists who identified to us that we have a real problem on our hands. **In fact, it's a crisis. It's a quiet crisis**, because like the spirit of God, which we know is present, present in this room, we can't necessarily see the carbon dioxide. But scientists tell us, this body of scientists tells us that our earth is in real trouble. We have to think carefully about that because God gave us this earth. Now, why should we even trust those scientists? It's probably best said by the founder of Interfaith Power and Light, the Reverend Sally Bingham. She's an Episcopal priest who's been canonized, actually now, and she put it very simply that "scientists are the prophets of our rapidly nearing future". We have to listen and understand that if **the carbon dioxide is at a certain level and it's been that since pre-history, and now, all of a sudden, within the next hundred years, it will be double that, that will cause real trouble!** Carbon dioxide corresponds to temperature; that is, the average world temperature is **getting warmer.... and this is a scary thing for what it will mean.**

This is the scary part of the message. I'm going to quickly move onward to scripture, so we can really focus in, because our scripture today from the

lectionary focuses on commandments. And we're hoping that God, through the prophets, through Jesus, has sent us a message, given us some commandments because... we need a little direction. But nonetheless it's just hard to know when you look at the cover of a bulletin, or you read this or that, which is the way to go.

Let me give you some numbers to think about. Last week I believe Russ spoke about creation, you looked at Genesis, you thought about Genesis. This is something we're quite familiar with. But is it scary to note that within the next fifty years a million species are likely to go extinct. This is not a million animals or a million creatures, this is a million species! It's that kind of scary numbers we don't like to think about. Other things will happen as it warms; tropical storms will increase. We only have to **look to the year 2005, at Katrina, to see what has happened. We connect with those people there** and we can still connect with them today through great films out there like a new one called "Trouble the Water" that get us associated with that. That's as in the spiritual "Wade in the Water". But it's not just the people in New Orleans...there but people in other challenged parts of the world that face up to drought, starvation. I received a communication recently from a Catholic priest in Uganda, whom we've helped. This Catholic priest is responsible for three AIDS orphanages in Uganda. And he would like to receive the books and materials that we're hoping to send in the coming weeks. And he looks forward to perhaps even seeing us before very long here in the United States. But meanwhile, the children are starving. And is this all connected? We find that it really is.

So last week in looking at Genesis, I don't know if it was covered or not, but part of the reason we of people of faith get into trouble is the word "dominion". So I just want to mention it in connection with last week, because the Hebrew for "dominion": "Be fruitful and multiply. Take dominion over the earth and all its creatures" kind of implies that we're in charge and we can do what we want. But in fact the original Hebrew translates much more to "care for", "to be responsible for".

Okay, we talking about commandments, and you'll remember that our lectionary scripture starts out "**if you love me you will keep my commandments**". In fact, the word "commandments" is mentioned 129 times in the Bible and in our scriptures today, though I'm not sure it was in this translation, it was mentioned twice, 'commandment'. So when we stop and think about commandments, where should we look for, you know, from a scriptural standpoint. Where can we get our reference point?

Well, if you don't mind I thought I'd move a little bit more among you and ask you turn to Exodus. If you have a Bible handy, if you don't you can just listen.

I'm sure there are some in the pews. But turn to Exodus 20. You will probably quickly recognize when you get there, it's **the Ten Commandments**, very familiar scripture for those of us here, very familiar to most people. Let's take a look at these scriptures. And I'm not going to talk about all of them, but I'm going to talk about a few of them in a new light.

Okay, starting with "**You shall have no other gods before me**". This gets us connected with the holiness of God, and in fact, we have to understand in this commandment, this rule, if you will, we have to place God at a highest priority, and the words of God. And the second one ties into it a little bit "you shall not make yourself a graven image or any likeness or anything". Graven images, what graven images do we have today? The proverbial dollar sign. It's with us, we get it reinforced all the time in the communications that we have, newspapers we read, the television, you name it. The dollar sign, let's go out, spend, buy.... advertising. Does the dollar sign become too much of a thing. It does, I think we all know, it's really hard when we hear this throughout the week. Dollar signs connect with climate change in a very strange way, a likely way. Because as we continue to consume we use the planet, and those products and things which we think we need, which maybe we really don't. It takes oil; it takes petroleum to get those products to us. Something to think about.

Let's jump ahead a little bit, "**remember the Sabbath, and keep it holy.**" Well here we are on Sunday and it's so great to be here, you know, among you. But think about this afternoon how often, and this ties in a little with the commandment I just mentioned, we wind up spending money after we leave here on Sunday. We go do this, the stores are open now, we can go shopping. Let me suggest something different. It's a great sunny day, this Sunday, next Sunday, Sundays through out May, get out, take a walk, get in God's great outdoors. When we come in contact with nature, we develop an appreciation, we learn to love the outdoors and we realize that love of God in giving us this great world that we have.

Let's go on to another one. "**Thou shall not kill.**" One million species. You know it very popular when we talk about global warming to think about polar bears they're big and furry. They're actually pretty mean. The Museum of Natural History in Salt Lake just recently had a "Polar Bear Palooza" where it brought people together. In fact, I talked to a person from the Navajo nation who's very concerned about what is happening to Earth. And last week you heard about Chief Seattle, what a great thing to connect with Native Americans and our human connection to the planet. One of the first creatures to likely go extinct is the little furry pika...right here in Utah. If we get out there, if we get out and walk amongst the animals and the creatures, we get more connected and we realize that we can't, we can't in a clear conscience, let them die from our actions. Certainly we can't stop breathing. Certainly we're still going to drive

some places, but we can decide we're going to drive a little bit less. We can decide we're going to car pool. What we drive makes a difference. We can decide that we need renewable energy here in Bountiful, here and throughout, the state of Utah. We can decide these things and act accordingly. "Thou shall not kill." I mentioned Katrina earlier that many people died in 2005, many people in Europe, 50,000 died in 2004. You know we can't look at an isolated weather event like Katrina and say "that's climate change." But in fact, there were greater than 26 major storms in 2005, we ran out of letters in the alphabet. That, we can look at, we can look at the correlation of the heating of the tropical seas. And through our consumptive culture, we play a part in the cause of that.

"Thou shall not steal." Now here's something to think about. We're all thieves. Now that's maybe not what you want to hear on Sunday morning; you'd like to continue to hear good news. But in fact, all of humanity is stealing from future generations. It's so great to have these children here but what happens when these children 20yrs from now see that things are worse? What happens when these children look us in the eye and say **"if we knew why didn't we do something? Why didn't we do everything we can?"** And sometimes this is challenging an other person to think about that styrofoam cup that they bought or think about that "we need curbside recycling here in Bountiful." Or think about what our political leaders are doing and to ask them to do more. It's funny, since Katrina, since "An Inconvenient Truth", interest in climate change has pulled back a little bit, it's below our radar screen. But when you think of it in context of stealing from future generations, it's stealing.... it maybe not be us, you know, but we can't really look at other people, we can't really judge what other people are doing. **We have to act, and we have to set an example.** Some people like to look at the country of China and say "oh, look at this Asian cloud that came across the Pacific and now it's coming our way." But we can buy less, getting to one of those earlier commandments. We can consume less; we can ask the question "do we really need that?" Because what we do otherwise is we continue to consume too much, we continue to use too much energy. Here's kind of a shocking number. The United States, the people of the United States, use 30% of the world's energy, but we're only 5% of the world's population. The average German uses half the energy that we Americans use. Half. So we really use too much energy.

This past January we were invited, and the public was invited, to the University of Utah for a special interfaith event. I was also invited up to Logan and Utah State University. At universities across the land, there were events called "Focus the Nation". What actually happened, here, was that the universities said, in Utah "please arrange for different people of faith to be there." It was great to have people from the Episcopal Church, like Bishop Carolyn Irish Tanner, speak. And representatives from the LDS Church spoke. And a representative from the Jewish community spoke. But the person who really caught my attention was

the new Imam at the Khadeejah Mosque in West Valley City in Salt Lake, right here in the valley. **This Imam, Mohammed Shoeabe..., he summed up it in one word, "greed"**. We don't like to hear that word; we don't think it connects with us. But if we think of the Ten Commandments and stealing from future generations, it's true.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or anything that's your neighbor's." ...like their flat panel TV. We go to the stores, we see this, oh it would be nice to have that, oh yes it would. And flat panel TV's, if they're not large actually use a little bit less energy, but if you put your hands up to them you can feel the heat. Any device that produces heat or cooling uses a lot of electricity. Maybe we could turn off those heat producing energy hogs more often. Covet our neighbor's house? Bigger, bigger, bigger. And maybe that doesn't apply to us here, you know, and that's great, if you live in a smaller house. I know that mine is a thousand square feet...not very big, but big enough...really. And sometimes it's a little crowded with me and my wife. But nonetheless, there's too much of a tendency and perhaps you know someone who's thinking about a larger house rather than thinking about, **"what can we actually live with? What is best for this great world that God has created?"**

That covers the 10 commandments pretty well on climate change. I know there's a few that don't necessarily fit in. But I think it's important to realize that **these are commandments**. They're from God. Let's take a look beyond the 10 commandments to the New Testament. And we start thinking commandments in the New Testament we immediately think of the two greatest commandments. These are the words of Jesus, we know them. So, they basically distill into "love of God, love God with all our heart and soul", and "love of neighbor, you're your neighbor as yourself". So we have to decide who our neighbors are, or has it been decided in this ever tightening world? I really think it has. **Our neighbors are beyond our community here, they're beyond the Salt Lake Valley, and they're beyond the state of Utah.** Though we can do things to help people in our community, like driving less when the air is bad, or driving slower on the freeway, which saves gas and actually helps us out with that little dollar sign thing. These are things that we can do. We can help out. But think of the greater world. We think with great sorrow about Sudan, about the Darfur region. But we don't stop to think that the neighbor to the west of Sudan is Chad. And if you look on the web, or read about Lake Chad, Lake Chad since the 1960's is getting smaller and smaller and smaller. And there are 2 million refugees from the Darfur region in Chad right now, and you know what, they're mostly Christian; they're part of our faith. And they make their living off the land, they farm. And how can they farm with less water? So it really does reach beyond. **Are these people our neighbors, are future generations our neighbors? Are the furred and feathered creatures**

that will not soon be with us, if we continue the way we are, are they not our neighbors? Something to really think about.

I want to go to near the end of the Bible. The Second Letter to John. You can look if you like, chapter 1 verse 6, actually starting at 5 **"Not as though we were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, that we love one another."** And verse 6, **"And this is love, that we follow God's commandments. This is the commandment as you have heard from the beginning, that you follow love."** It all kind of circles back to that, doesn't it? It's interesting. I sometimes think, and if there are any students of the Bible here you might be shocked, to think of the concept of reducing the Bible to four words: **Love God. Love neighbor;** or reducing the Bible to one word: Love. If we truly care about those future generations and we know we've got a problem on our hands, we have to do as best we can to try and do something -- to really try and make it work out. Because we can, there are things that we can do. There's exciting news out there about a Grand Solar plan in Scientific American December 2007. So this a way that we can actually make ourselves energy independent by the year 2050, and emitting far, far less carbon dioxide. **We must not feel helpless and we must face this quiet crisis.** There are many things we each can do..., I'll have a sheet afterwards and will enjoy talking to you during the coffee hour; because there are all sorts of things we can personally do to make a difference.

Now, may I ask a question? **Compact fluorescent lamps? Is it an act of faith to take one these and screw it in? It is. I think it is.** Have you all done this, or all had a chance to do that? Really think about that. Some people don't like the light it puts out or like the fact that it warms up in 30 seconds to full brightness...but what's at stake, really? If we each change our five most used bulbs, it will reduce the need for additional coal power plants that the state of Utah and the state of Nevada are considering. It will reduce that need. It can be an act of faith.

Let's pray: "Dear God, we recognize that climate change is upon us. Help us to act, to get involved, to make a difference. We recognize that time runs short, that within a few short years it may be too late. And so we need to act now. We need to do what we can. Help us to reach out to others to remember your word of Love, to remember not to steal, not to do the other things that your Ten Commandments guide us against doing; these things that personally connect us with this quiet crisis that's upon all of creation. Amen."

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