

2 October 2011

The people were travelling across a big, hot desert. Mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, aunts and uncles, girls and boys. They were looking for a new home. Moses was leading them.

The sun hurt their eyes.

The sand hurt their feet.

They were thirsty.

They were tired.

After a long while, the people forgot how to live in loving ways. Sometimes they pushed and shouted. Sometimes they took food that belonged to others. Sometimes the children didn't listen to their parents and the parents didn't listen to their children. Sometimes they didn't stop to take time to be with god. Day after day the people became more and more unhappy.

Moses was a loving leader and wanted to help his people. What could Moses do? Moses decided to climb a mountain and pray to God. "Please help us God. The people have forgotten how to live in loving ways".

Soon God answered Moses. "Moses, I will give my people some loving rules so they will learn to show love to one another". Moses listened carefully. Then Moses wrote everything down so he wouldn't forget what God had said. "Thank you, dear God" said Moses. "This is a wonderful gift to the people."

Early the next morning, Moses climbed down the mountain and called all the people together. 'I have wonderful news for you. God has given us some loving ways to help us live together. Come and listen". Now the people were curious. What were these loving ways?

And then Moses told the people of how god imagined this world to be. (*Spread the numbered and blank hearts near you. Each time a numbered heart is chosen, read the corresponding rule.*)

1. Remember, God is love.
2. There is only one loving God.
3. Say God's name with Love.
4. Take time to rest and pray to God.
5. Parents and children, love and care for one another.
6. Share with each other.

There were other loving rules, too. The people looked at each other and smiled. And then they prayed, “Thank you, God, for keeping your promise and bringing us back together again. Your way is full of love”.

At last week's family service, we saw the Israelites trudging through the desert, complaining, weary and thirsty. Are we there yet?, they asked, searching for the promised land, grumbling.

After listening to God Moses struck the rock and water flowed and the thirsty drank and were refreshed. Today we have heard of these same people, lost and unruly. Again God provides, living water, ways to live in love.

The original form and Hebrew language in Exodus 20 suggest that the commandments first may have been simply a list of ten words. Love, murder, Idolatry, adultery, share and so on. These words were shorthand for a rule of life to guide the people of Israel along their journey to become the nation that was promised to Abraham.

The ten commandments summarise God's vision of life. First, acknowledge God as God alone, honour our relationship with God. In the one about the Sabbath, we are encouraged to match the rhythm of our lives with God's own rhythm. Take time to work and to rest. The rest lay out God's loving wisdom so that our relationship with other people, reflects God's relationship with us. Martin Luther (1453 – 1546) great theologians say that every negative in the list implies a positive. E.g ‘Do not kill’ implies ‘support the living’, do not steal implies ‘honour each other’. These commandments offer a vision of the world that God promises to bring to fulfilment. (Seasons of the Spirit p52).

Paul Tankey (dailyheadspa.com) posed this question. What if these ten commandments are actually statements of hope. What if ‘thou shalt’ does not mean ‘you must’ but ‘one day you will, it's a promise’. One day you will not steal....to that we might add: one day all people will honour each other’.

What might the world be like if we imagined the world of God's promise?. In 2004, John Lennon's song Imagine was voted by Rolling Stone magazine as the third greatest song of all time. For generations the song has inspired to imagine, to hope, to have a vision of a world living in peace and harmony.

On 29 August this year, the HeraldSun told of a young singer from Melbourne, Emmanuel Kelly, whose rendition of Imagine earned him a standing ovation from the judges and the audience on the auditioned television show ‘The X Factor’. Emmanuel and his brother Ahmed had been abandoned at an orphanage in Iraq, both suffering limb deficiencies as a result of chemical warfare. They were adopted and brought to Australia by the head of the Children First foundation, Moira Kelly.

Ronan Keating, one of the judges was full of praise of Emmanuel. ‘I don't think I've ever been moved as I was by that performance, he said. (Bruce Grindley Spirit sightings).

What do you think stirs people's emotions in John Lennon's song Imagine? What might be some outcomes of Imagining the world of God's promise?

If the commandments were originally 10 words that summarised rules of living – ten words of hope, what words might we accept as life giving for our community? Do any particular words stand out from these commandments or from your experience?

I've tried a few.

Love, compassion, hospitality, generosity, forgiveness, reconciliation, rest, care, share, unfold, welcome, listen/attend, loyalty, restore, faith, beauty.

What do you notice about these words? How might you summarise them? What is missing?

Now, let's look at an opposite or word denoting harm for each of these:- and notice where do we see evidence of these words within and around you?

Hatred, exclusion, selfishness, ignorance, condemnation, greed, doubt, overwork, ugliness, restless, pettiness, distraction.

Are these part of your life? Of the life of this community?

What enables you/me to embody that which is life giving in the middle of these challenges and resistance?

How about this weekend, you go back to the commandments in Exodus 20 and look at signs of hope – imagine and write your own life giving words. A rule to govern your life.... Let me know how you go....