

God Commands? Simple or Complicated?

Sermon for the 18th Sunday after Trinity

Sermon Text: Deuteronomy 30:11-14



¹¹ “For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off.

¹² It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?’ ¹⁴ But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.”

The older I get, the more complicated life seems. Sometimes I sit in front of a mountain of papers and must fill out some forms. For example, that happens when I must fill out my tax returns. Then I sit before a mountain of receipts, documents, and records. Sometimes I just want to check all the boxes and send the papers away! But no, that isn't possible because then it will be really expensive. It is the same with so many other things. Everything seems to have gotten more complicated. Telephone contracts, electricity contracts, housing contracts, etc. Couldn't life be so much easier without paper? Today we read from a book that is filled with a lot of paperwork. It is a contract between God and His people. In Deuteronomy it is explained in detail what one must do and what one should not do. For example, it says in the same book that you are not allowed to keep donkeys and cattle in the same field; or men are not allowed to wear women's clothes and women are not allowed to wear men's clothes. If a bird and its young fall from a tree, you may take the little ones but you must let the adult bird fly freely. So really, you can save the world through such commands! Not everyone can understand everything. That's why many an Israelite had the feeling of simply checking a box and it's done. But that's not how a contract works. In a contract, it is important that both parties want to have the contract. If one or both parties don't really want the contract, there is no need to write a contract. And if you want to sign a contract with one another, you must first understand what the contract is all about. One has to understand the goal of the contract. And so, God takes us once again by the hand and explains the main point. From the most important point, you can understand the smallest detail. And so, God says to us through Moses: Everything is not as complicated as it seems. The word that I say to you is not far away so that you must fly to heaven for it or that you must travel to the other end of the earth for it. It is also not difficult. The gist of it is that God wants to give life to His people. Do this so you will live. The whole law of God can be summarized like this. And this word that God gave Moses is so close that everyone

even has it in their hearts. Do good and you will live, do evil and you will die. The point of this law is not that the entire broken world as we know it will be fixed by keeping cattle and donkeys apart. It's also not about how we take care of the fallen bird's nest. But everything has a source and an origin. If you can remember today's epistle and Gospel readings, we find the origin and source there. There it says: We should love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbors as ourselves. That is where life is found. This command is simple and obvious. If every person in the entire world did this, we would have no more problems and we would have heaven on earth. But we don't yet have heaven here on earth. The general question is whether we humans seek or expect life in God or not? It seems we have other ideas about what would make life better. Or what life is important for. We humans do not see life in God but rather in ourselves. So long as I feel good and I'm healthy, life is meaningful and worth living. Some even try with all their strength to prolong this life on earth. But even if we could stop the process of aging and eliminate death, it would not be paradise here on earth. On the contrary, it would be hell on earth. God in His unending wisdom knows how difficult it is for us to recognize Him and His will. Therefore, He takes us by the hand, just as He did with Moses: He shows us what is truly important and what moves us. God's will is not an idea or a law, but God's will takes on flesh and blood. Nowhere can you see all this more clearly than in Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus Christ shows unbroken and undivided love for the heavenly Father in His whole life. This love doesn't stay with Him. No, in encounters with others, He literally pours Himself out so that others can have a piece of Him. I am always surprised at how easily Jesus just spends his life for others. Everywhere He goes, He wastes His time. He lets people bother Him, holds the little children on His lap; who do not even understand him. And He deals with people who have no more hope at all. In the end, Jesus wastes His entire life. Instead of saving and preserving His life, He simply just pours it out. Our human feeling is that we should shout Stop: "Jesus, don't do that! save Yourself!" That is our human instinct to do this. Jesus doesn't do that. Instead, He only ever has one plan. He wants to do the will of the Father. And that will is love. In our world, there is no place for such a love and for such a will of God. That's why everything must end so horribly and Jesus must die on the cross. And yet on the cross, we get the deepest insight into God's will and His love. On the cross, everything that was previously complicated and obscure suddenly becomes clear. When Jesus suffered the worst agony and was forsaken by God, it becomes clear that God wants only one thing from beginning to end. He wants to save us. Because He loves us, He wants that. And after the cross, as Jesus rose again, God ultimately eliminated all darkness of sin and death. God's contract is also finally sealed there. Only now do I understand why God told Moses that everything was so much simpler than it looks. God's contract with the many rules and laws were all just references to Jesus. In the end, God knows exactly what He wants. He wants to fulfill the contract Himself since we can't fulfill it ourselves. That's the secret! And in this contract that is ultimately fulfilled by Jesus, lies the fate of the entire world. If you are in Jesus, you will live. And this Jesus is close to you. He is also very much your destiny. So close that you can eat Him today. I know that our life remains complicated. The many contracts that we have are only one side. The other side is that we keep facing this terrible reality that we can't trust anyone. That's why our human contracts are so complicated. Quite different with God in Jesus. There, everything is crystal clear and unambiguous. He loves completely and He gives entirely of Himself and His life. For you and for me. Amen.