

"Are You a Fence-Walker?" – March 19, 2017
by Wayne J. Schneider – Soli Deo Gloria

Are You a Fence-Walker?" Exodus 20:1-17

The recent announcement that "American slaves were immigrants" notwithstanding, slavery was heinous. Imagine a life without freedom of any kind. Everything you do daily is at the whim of another. You may question nothing even if what is asked of you harms you physically, emotionally or spiritually.

You may be forced to be a cook or you work in the fields from sun up to sun down. You move stone to build a tower or a pyramid. And, your family could be sold and moved hundreds of miles away from you without a moment's notice.

Suddenly, you are granted freedom. Following 40 decades of slavery, you and your family are freed to live a life of your own. After the adrenalin rush, what is going to happen? How do you earn a living? Exactly how do you begin making decisions for yourself having never done so? How do freed people live and behave?

If we can place ourselves in that location we can begin to grasp the pressure of responsibility Moses experienced, leading the Israelites out of Egypt. Of all the Jewish people, Moses is the only one who knew what it was 'to be free.'

As we see so often, it is God who calls: this time it is Moses to return to Egypt to face his past and lead God's people to freedom.

Following the rigorous time of the plagues that convinced the Pharaoh '*to let my people go,*' they made their escape through the Red Sea to the foot of Mt. Sinai. It is here that Moses ascends as the people's ambassador, to collect what we now label the Ten Commandments.

Our American system of law is based on these commandments, and the substance of how to live together in virtue is also firmly seated there. You would need to be deaf and blind not to know that the world needs a 'refresher' course on how to live together peaceably.

The fabulous tenor, Luciano Pavarotti, recounts how he chose singing as a passion and a career. His papa made music familiar to him as a child and he fell deeply in love. There was a time when he was taking professional tenor voice lessons and in college on track to be a teacher. Upon graduation, he was faced with a challenging choice: the opera or becoming a teacher.

His papa offered advice: *"If you try to sit on two chairs, you will fall between them. For life, you must choose one chair."* That is the essence of commitment: choosing one chair.

The Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, are the basics God shared with Moses to teach these ex-slaves how to live as God's people. These commandments are separated into two sections. The first section tells us how to be in a relationship with God. Listen again: *"I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You must have no other gods before me. Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance. Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy."*

The second section shows us how to be in a relationship with others, and almost all of the commandments are in the negative form. It appears as though God is treating His people as children, and the tiny word little children learn first is 'no.' The word is often uttered for their protection. The only positive commandment is *"to honor your father and mother,"* meaning to esteem them and to be sure they are taken care of. The other verses in the second section are: *"Do not Kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not testify falsely against your neighbor and do not desire anything of your neighbor's."*

When Jesus walked this earth the Ten Commandments were encapsulated in St. Matthew 22:37-39, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'*

In our Lenten journey together, we have learned that trust is the first of five dysfunctions in our spiritual relationship with God. And, that being honest with God is the Second. Today, we have glanced at the third dysfunction: lack of commitment. As the Israelites wandered in the desert, it was the uncertainty of what they were doing, and why, that caused the 'disconnect' with God.

A man wanted to sell his house in Haiti for two thousand dollars and a buyer wanted to own the house, but was unable to find all the money needed. After much negotiation the owner agreed to accept one thousand dollars with one caveat, one condition: he would still be the owner of one nail that was hanging over the front door. The house was sold with that agreement.

Several years past and the original owner wanted to re-purchase the home but the new owner did not wish to sell. The first owner looked around and found a dead dog, and placed it upon the nail he owned over the front door of the house. Soon, in Haiti's humid heat, the house became un-livable and forced the family to sell the house back to the original owner of the nail.

In reality, this is a metaphor for many in the church today. Leaving just one small area of our lives uncommitted to Jesus results in some petrification that, like yeast, invades our entire life. Our extreme need as Followers of the Way is to have every area of our lives committed to Jesus and walking in His way.

When we trust each other and are willing to share honestly what we believe, working out our differences, then we are prepared to commit to serving together in God's Kingdom.

God gave to the world, and to all of us as ex-slaves, these ten basic commandments on how to live with God and with each other. Are we able and eager to commit to these Ten in the relationships of our lives? Are we enthusiastic in making the Ten Commandments the footing of our willingness to learn to love in all that we do? Alleluia. Amen.