



“Thou Shalt Not Kill”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

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Scripture (NRSV):

Exodus 20:13

From the New Revised Standard Version: You shall not commit murder.

From the King James Bible: Thou shalt not kill.

From the Christian Standard Bible: Do not murder.

From the Common English Bible: Do not kill.

From the Complete Jewish Bible: Do not murder.

From the Darby Translation: Thou shalt not kill.

From the Easy to Read Bible: You must not murder anyone.

From the God’s Word Translation: Never murder.

From the International Standard Version: You are not to commit murder.

From the Orthodox Jewish Bible: Thou shalt not murder.

From the Wycliffe Bible: Thou shalt not slay.

And from Young’s Literal Translation: Thou dost not murder.

Sermon:

I looked at 51 Bible translations of this verse in Exodus. As you have heard, there isn’t a lot of variation.

It’s there, blunt and to the point: don’t kill.

In case we have forgotten in our massacre prone, blood-soaked culture of senseless violence...this is the sixth commandment of the ten given to Moses on the mountain by God as the Hebrew slaves escaped into the desert, and lived out there in the wilderness.

That is how the story goes in the book of Exodus:

Through the help of Moses, God's messenger, they have received their freedom, the food needed to live, the water needed to sustain them, and now they receive rules of life for free people. Not slaves any longer, they have to make decisions, set guidelines, make rules for their life together as a community.

Before, they were always told what to do by a master. Before, their lives were not their own. They were bought and sold, and worked mercilessly; their children were drowned in the Nile...but that has all changed now.

So Moses goes up on the mountain to commune with Yahweh, and comes back to those ex-slaves with ten rules.

When you think about it, that is not very many at all! We have dozens and dozens. But there are some basic ones we teach our kids: from "clean up your own mess", to "don't run in the street", to "say please and thank you", to "don't shoot semi-automatic weapons into a crowd of concert goers".

Never murder. Do not kill.

It's not complicated. I'm sorry, I know there is an endless debate about the nuances of this commandment...I am not here to make it easy for us. But it is also not complicated.

It says that we shall not murder, shall not kill.

And yet, we do.

This ancient command was meant to focus us on God, not ourselves. God is the holder of all life, Yahweh created all life, Yahweh values creatures enough to breathe the breath of life into all of them and create a world that sustains life: breath after breath after breath. Can we remember this, humbling ourselves?

We are not the Makers of the Cosmos. We are not the Creators of all things. You cannot give any other creature life and breath, (except through reproduction).

Therefore, remain humble about your life, and grateful for it.

Your blood, the ancients believed, was the source of your life. (And it is, along with oxygen.) Without blood, there is no life in us. God gave us our life, and our blood. Mighty and powerful gift, the gift of life.

So the ancients had laws around blood, shedding blood, taking a life.

It was an act that mimicked God almost, an act of power, to take a life. So, just wringing the neck of a chicken, or the slaughter of a goat, was filled with awe and power. The power of life and death. The power of the Creator, loaned to us.

Never, never were the Jewish people to *simply* kill an animal, or a person. It was never simple, it was never meant to be.

Because life is sacred. Filled with the force of God. It comes to us when we are born, and it leaves us when we die, but our human bodies are imbued with the power of God...life force.

One of my favorite mystics, Hildegard von Bingen, called it “greening power”... she saw it pulsing through everything and everyone. She also saw when it withered through human violence, corruption, hate.

As we sit here together, we have to live into our “greening power”.

Jesus called it the “law of love”. He lived and died, and rose again to make clear that the greatest law, was the law of love...love of God and love of the other and love for ourselves.

In our blood-soaked country we have to do this work of viewing the world as full of God, full of God’s life giving power:

Look around in awe at every living person and thing.

See the life force of our endlessly creative God in everything and every person.

See, with the eyes of God, how beloved we are in our uniqueness and our complexity.

Wail for the deaths of those whose unique and God-filled lives have been snuffed out.

Grieve for the suffering of the hundreds that are wounded.

And take action. In your bulletin are eight suggestions from a member of the UCC national offices regarding steps we can take to make our society safer, kinder, less violent.

I believe that many in America today do not believe in the majesty and mystery of life. Capitalist industries, our games, the stories we tell all reflect:

That life is cheap. And regretfully, humans do not respect the power of life; in other human beings, in the creation, in oneself.

Whether you write to those in power, or vote some of them out of office, or not...you can witness in your own life, we can each of us witness in our lives, love respect and awe at life.

We can model what we believe by simply offering dignity and respect to all life in our interactions.

Let us continue to seek to be courageous, and generous, loving and gentle, open minded and big hearted.

There is much that is wrong, much that is broken in our society. Let us reweave the fabric around us with the laws of love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, kindness, and yes, even just good old-fashioned manners!

Let us live our lives around the laws we believe in, and that includes this one: Thou shalt not kill.

Amen.