

After the Sermon Hymn: *Stepping down to the congregation:*

Ex 20: 1-4,7-9, 12-20 **“God’s Loving Wisdom”** (10/02/2011)

- by Rev. Peter Dennebaum -

God’s peace with you!

When you look at the front cover of your worship folder – what do you think will our second, the sermon reading about? ☺ ...

Yes, today we will talk about the 10 Commandments. So please open your pew bibles on page 66. Let us read together what God gave to us through Moses at the Mount Sinai. We read from the second book of Moses, Exodus, and chapter 20, the verses 1-4, then 7-9 and finally 12-20. Whenever we need to jump within the text we will pause and I will announce the next verse number so that we all have time to find the next part.

**Ex 20: 1-4, 7-9, 12-20 (The Ten Commandments)**

Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.

4 You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or

that is in the water under the earth. [...we jump to verse 7...]

7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

8 Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>For six days you shall labor and do all your work. [...we jump to verse 12...]

12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup>and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.' <sup>20</sup>Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you

do not sin.' .... AMEN.

The text is old; we have heard it many times, already as children in Sunday school, and how often since then... What is your first reaction? Are you tired to hear about the 10 commandments? Don't you think that we all fulfill them – more or less? Are the 10 commandments not fulfilled through the free way we live? Don't we allow everybody to live how they want to live – don't we fulfill the 10 Commandments? What do you think?

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In NYC, at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 29<sup>th</sup> Street, with the house number 274, are two inviting glass doors. Last week Friday I entered through these doors. Behind them opens up a nice wooden floor, which gives the space for a good sized conference room with a big double circle of chairs, in the back an open kitchen and along the corridor, which leads further into the back, small, but modern offices with glass fronts. This is the location of Intersections International.

Intersections International is a non-government organization (NGO) that works at the intersection of communities in conflict. On 9/11, during the Peace Walk, Marcie, David and I met one of their directors – a former Minister, a licensed psychotherapist and now Director of Social Dialogue and Training. Founded in 2007, Intersections is a multi-cultural, multi-faith and global initiative, using arts immersion, social marketing, intentional dialogue and other innovative methods,

to promote global pluralism, peace, dialogue with the Islam, indigenous people or LGBT equality.

Executive Director of Intersections International is an UCC-Minister, the Rev. Robert Chase - a cousin of UCC-Garden City member and Metro-Association officer Peg Mainusch.

Last week I participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> Dialogue between Veterans and Civilians. I was very nervous; I know how emotional and impulsive I can be. I never understood how people can join the army.

When I left High School I decided against the army, but for an alternative civil service. At this time, 1987 you had to justify your decision against the army. It was a certainty for me to argue with verse 13 of our text: "You shall not murder." It was also clear to me that I would never allow somebody to yell at me. For me, to the army went only people who didn't have the ability to structure themselves – weak people with other words. – And my opinion has not changed really since then. I also had learned as child that in Stalingrad all the farmer boys were used as fuel [fu-el] – while the officers with connections had made sure that they were able to have a comfortable life in occupied Paris. I am not sure what happens with the young adults from the Midwest, but I could imagine that they get also thrown into conflicts without their deeper knowledge or understanding.

My Faith, my education and my character didn't allow me as young man to go the army.

But politically I always argued interesting wise with the necessity of armies. Already 1979, I was 12 years old, I was in opposite to the rest of my family in FAVOR of the NATO- Double-Track Decision, which offered the Warsaw Pact a mutual limitation of ballistic missiles – and for the case, that they wouldn't accept the threat to install own ones in Western Europe.

Even I cannot kill somebody myself I don't ignore the fact, that there are not only good people on earth. President Reagan felt the same, when he presented 1988 Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev with the 1956 Civil War film "Friendly Persuasion" about a pacifist Quaker family in Indiana, starring Gary Cooper.

Can a Christian be a soldier? Must a Christian be a soldier?

On the music sheets Liz gave me for tonight's Sunday Night's Club is the Hymn "Christian Soldiers". It is also in our Hymnal. I don't know how you feel, but being aware how often we as Christians have misused God and Jesus for our own wars my hackles raise when I hear this military language in church; we had the crusades, and whenever a president starts a war you have the guarantee that he will show up the next Sunday demonstrative in a church.

Still in modern days the blessing of the own weapons seems to be necessary when you start a war. It is about the moral justification. And we all know: Never in history an aggressor has said: "I attack!" War is always justified with 'defending' or "protecting" somebody –

might it be the own country or people in the country, which should get now attacked. Even the Second World War started with this kind of lie: "Since 5.45am we shoot BACK." - cinked the Nazi propaganda, when Nazi-Germany started the obliteration campaign against Poland.

In any case, war is always justified with "Human Rights". --- In the past as the present.

Our text says: "You shall not murder." It does NOT say "You shall not murder except you fight for Human Rights'. It is formulated very rigid.

But the Second World War taught my generation also: Never again genocide is allowed to happen. Never again Auschwitz! This was the reason, why many even more left wing people changed 1998 in the light of the Kosovo Conflict from pure pacifism to being in favor of a "just war".

But is a "Just War" possible at all? If in a war only the bad guys would be killed we probably would have no objections to a war. But we all know that this is not the case. First and foremost innocent people get killed in a war. People like you and me. To make us not being too much aware about it, they call it "collateral damage". How many collateral damages do you think are ok to justify a war? --- one, one hundred, one thousand, one hundred thousand? Who decides on this? Who can be a judge about life or death?

In Iran this week Yucef Nadarchani got sentenced to death. The 35

yo protestant minister and father of 2 children converted in the age of 19 from Islam to Christianity. This is now what they accuse him about. Is the Islamic Republic of Iran allowed to judge about life or death?

Last week 41 yo Troy David got executed in Georgia. Is Georgia allowed to judge about life or death?

Is sentencing to death allowed in a democracy, but not in other forms of government? According to Amnesty International 2010 90% of all 714 official announced executions were carried out in China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, US and Yemen. If you ask me: Not very flattering to be in the neighborhood to these regimes – all together autocratic ones!

“You shall not murder.” If you are a lawyer you might try the following argument: “Murder” is killing without legalization, but not killing itself. If a court or a parliament justifies it, killing is permitted and cannot called murder anymore and would not be touched anymore by our “Do not murder.” commandment.

This is my answer: Nice try! Because the used Hebrew word “razach” doesn’t justify this kind of legalistic hairsplitting. “Razach’ means “to kill” or “to murder”. It is a general term. We could translate it also with “You should not take life away.” (Added in brackets: This is only God’s noble right. End of brackets)

This gets us, after war and death penalty, immediately into the third

and last field of our ethical struggle around this commandment:  
Abortion. Is pro choice now Christian or not?

It is always hard to say which part of our opinion exactly is faith based, which one influenced by family, education and social environment and which one is our own political opinion. Just remember: You can read pretty much everything INTO or OUT OF the bible.

The question about abortion can lead us also to the key about war and death penalty. In the debate about pro choice or not we learned at minimum one thing:

It is not only about the planted new life, it is also about the mother. The drama happens within a relationship. As God is already in her- and himself relationship - is parent (1), son (2) and Holy Ghost (3).

Simple answers would be nice, but are not often realistic. We need to have veneration for life. But saving, protecting or advocating for life requires always looking at the contexts and relations. I like the German word for veneration – “Ehrfurcht”. “Ehrfurcht” is a combination of the words: to honor or respect and fear – fear of God. The last word about life or death belongs to God – not us!

Yes, surely, the command not to murder had historically the function to stop vendetta. But it tells us also unmistakably that life has divine character and that we have to be very conservative when it comes to take it. [I always found it strange that especially conservatives are so

fast with taking life ...]

The veteran I met at the Intersections International Dialogue preached to me in his own way. In small groups we shared, our standpoints. I waited until everybody had said something. Then I shared some of the things, I shared now also with you. I spoke about my German heritage, how we caused so many wars and why I have therefore so many problems with all this patriotism in this country – knowing that each lost life is a drama and nothing to be proud of. I asked him, the veteran, how he deals with the fact that he was sent into the Iraq war based on lies of the Bush-administration and how he feels when he thinks about the families of those innocent he killed? (Again: 140,000 innocent civilians have been killed in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq according to Brown University.)

I still see him in front of me, sitting in the circle, maybe 30years old, attentively listening. Then he said very calm, looking very thoughtful: “I am also a citizen and I have my own opinion about the war in Iraq. I think about the ones, we kill, especially accidentally and we talk about them among ourselves.”

In this moment I was able to see in him not anymore the soldier alone, but his humanity, his own vulnerability, his own drama. In this moment I understood which responsibility politicians have and the media, when they stir up emotions – and us, if we follow with hurray the call to war or consider first within our families and church very carefully, what this might mean for the young people we sent into

psychological, emotional and moral conflict. Could you kill somebody? If not, don't be the first one calling for war.

I give thanks to the young man, who allowed me to see his own humanity and heart. I, who had come with so many excitements to this place, accusations in my heart, left after many conversations within these 3 hours as one of the last ones into the night in Manhattan – in peace and filled with many thoughts.

Intersections International plans on one point in the future to include Iraqi people in this dialogue, making it a tria-logue; Bringing them all together, the victims of war. A war has no winners –except the ones, who make a lot of money with it. A war leaves only victims on both sides behind. The dialogue between veterans and civilians just has started and will continue. The next one will be on Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>; you are invited!

The healing and reconciliation needs to go on. Because we do not listen to God's commandment "You shall not murder!"...

AMEN.