

“God’s Graffiti”

Deuteronomy 6:1-12

Series - Exodus: ReOpening God’s Way Week 6. Open Your Heart

The Rev. Dr. Douglas C. Hogle

The Woodside Church

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Graffiti can be interesting. On a wall at Purdue University a student wrote: “If God wanted us to use the metric system, he would have chosen ten disciples.” Next to a display of Valentine’s Day cards which vow “I love only you” someone printed: “Now available in multi-packs!” On the wall of a convent in Southern California a sign reads, “Absolutely no trespassing. Violators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. Signed, the Sisters of Mercy.”

What if God scrawled graffiti across our world? If He wanted to get our attention with just a few well-chosen words, what would they be? Believe it or not, of the thousands of verses in the Bible, two stand out above the rest. Every devote Jew knows these by heart and every Christian should. These words are the first and the greatest in all of Scripture according to Moses and Jesus. They are so essential Moses commands the Israelites to scrawl them, like graffiti, in plain sight.

In this final week of our series, we arrive at the end of the Exodus. At first the plagues, the Passover, the parting of the Sea, probably led Moses to believe this would be a quick and easy journey to the Promised Land. But when the Israelites, timid as grasshoppers, refused to take on the Canaanites, God condemned them to wander forty years in the wilderness until the entire generation passes away. Now, the next generation stares across the Jordan River at the Promised Land. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses’ farewell address to the people as they stand on the brink. He is painfully aware they must go into the land of milk and honey without him. When my children were little, I gave them rapid fire instructions before they went off to school.

Do you have all your books? Remember to turn in your homework. Don’t forget your lunch. And when you get home, start your homework before you turn on the television. Remember we’re going to Adventure Club tonight.”

“Yeah, yeah, Dad. We know,” they groaned as they slammed the door. If I didn’t issue these directions, they may forget what to do. Moses is probably also a bit nervous. He is the only leader they’ve ever followed. Once they settle in the Promised Land, they may forget all the Lord’s commands without him to remind them. Using repetition, Moses restates the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5). Then he goes a step farther. To help them grasp the heart of God’s Law, Moses distills it all down to a few simple words:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5 NRSV).

These are the most powerful, revolutionary, life-changing words ever uttered or recorded. Every arena of knowledge, every dimension of life is embraced by these two verses. Government and politics, religion and the sciences, psychology and philosophy, ecology, labor relations and the arts are all caught up in this handful of monosyllables. They are simple enough for a child to memorize and profound enough to keep Ph.D. s perplexed. Let's take them a word at a time.

First, **LORD**. If you read the passage in your Bible, you will notice this word is printed in capital letters. "Lord" is a title, such as president, chief or pastor. But the Hebrew word in this verse is not a title. It's a name – *the Name* – the name of God - YAHWEH. The Israelites honored God by using His title Lord every time they read His Name Yahweh in Bible. It's similar to when people call me Pastor instead of Doug. Why is it important to know God's name? Just as passwords give us access to computers, phones, files and the Internet, so God's true Name opens the door to the One, True God.

Just after 9/11 I worked several all-night shifts at St. Paul's Chapel on the edge of Ground Zero. We ministered to the needs of those working in the pit. I remember one time I spoke to a policeman who said, "I believe in a higher power. I think he goes by many different names. It really doesn't matter what you call him." "Perhaps," I said. "I guess that will take you so far. But if God took the effort to tell you His real name, wouldn't it make sense to use it?" "What do you mean?" he asked. "Well, I just told you my name," I continued, "If you want to get to know me, the best way to do it would be to say, 'Hey, Doug' instead of 'Hey, Ed' or 'Hey, you anonymous clergyperson.'" "Well how do you know you have the right name for God?" "I believe if God truly wants me to know Him, to have a relationship with Him, He will not send down a representative, a prophet, a religious teacher or a lawgiver. He will come in person. And He did. His Name is Jesus." The name "Jesus" means "Yahweh Saves." God's Name opens the door to a relationship with Him. He's more than a higher power. He's a Person.

Second word: **Alone**. "The LORD is our God, the LORD *alone*." It's hard to overestimate the power of this word. For the first time in history, a people worshiped one God. The Egyptians bowed down to multitude of gods: Osiris, Isis, Anubis, Amon Ra. The Canaanites praised Baal, Asherah and Molech. They identified these gods with the forces of nature: sun, moon, stars, rain, earth and agriculture. By worshiping these various gods, the Canaanites hoped to make their crops grow, their armies win, their nation increase. Science, religion and government depended on these gods. It would be easy for the Israelites, once they settle in the land, to fall into worshiping the forces of creation, as their neighbors did, and forget the Creator.

We know the forces of nature are not gods, but we are still easily lured into worshiping idols instead of the Lord. Business leader and coach Bob Buford presents an essential question. When he reached his mid-forties, a counselor drew a box and asked, "What's in your box? For you, it is either money or Jesus Christ. If you can tell me which it is, I can tell you the outcome of that choice. If you can't tell me, you are going to oscillate between those two values and be confused for a lifetime." What is your core belief, your primary loyalty, your overriding desire? What or who decides your direction and purpose? What's in your box? Money, career, advancement, family, fame, fear,

desire? If you want to find out what's most important to you, what's in your box, look at your credit card statement, your calendar, your internet search history. The things you spend your time, money and energy on will reveal what's in your box. If your box is like mine, it's crammed full. But think how different your life would be if Jesus is the only One in your box, the One who controls how you spend your time, money and all the other things in your life. That's what it means when the Lord *alone* is your God.

Third word: **Love**. Moses could have said, "Fear the Lord with all your heart" or "Serve the Lord" or "Obey." He chose "Love" because Moses knows what God desires most is not the trembling, groveling obedience of a slave but the loving affection of a dear child. The Apostle John reveals God, in His deepest nature is Love (I John 4:16). John adds, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. We love because He first loved us" (I John 4:10, 19). He doesn't just say, "I love you." God shows His love for us through the life of His Son.

Final word: **All**. Love the Lord your God with *all* your heart, and with *all* your soul, and with *all* your might. This is the toughest challenge of all. We may love God on Sunday morning but not Monday, in worship but not in our homes, our zoom work meeting or classroom, with our family but not our friends. I believe most Christians misunderstand this commandment. They think it says, love God more than your family, your friends, your work, your entertainment or your education. No. It's not love God *instead of* but love God *with all of* your heart, soul, might, family, friends, work, education and on and on. Let each area of your life be the way you love God back. That will radically change the way you treat your family and friends, pursue your career and relate to your neighbors and enemies.

Moses is convinced this is the very best way to live. So, to drive these simple words home, he commands them to plaster God's Graffiti on every surface.

These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:6-9

Write them on the doorjamb of your house and carve them into the lintel over the city gate so you will see them every time you go in and out. Inscribe them on your hands to remind you, like a wedding ring, of your relationship with God. Paste them on your forehead so everyone who meets you will remember to love God. And, most importantly, impress them on your children. Talk about them when you wake up and when you go to sleep, when you eat a meal and go on a trip. 'Children,' someone has said, 'are like wet cement. Whatever falls on them leaves an impression.' What you do and what you say will leave a mark on your children and everyone around you.

This time of social distancing reminds of something that's always been true: the primary way to pass on faith is from parent to child. Now more than ever, when we can't

hold Discovery Kingdom, School of the Rock, Adventure Club and VBS in the building, it is essential for parents to practice and pass on faith in Jesus to their children. Read the Bible and pray together throughout the day. Worship and Serve together. Your actions speak far louder than your words. What impression are you leaving on others? Is it doubt or faith? Despair or hope? Hate or love? Righteousness starts in the home, so does racism. Hurt begins at home. So does heartfelt love for God, your family, your neighbors.

And that leads to the Second more important commandment. After loving God Jesus quotes another commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18). These go together. We don’t really love God if we don’t love our neighbors. That’s why, starting next Sunday, we will do a deep dive in August into The Art of Neighboring. Yes everyone can be our neighbor. But what if Jesus meant for us to begin by loving our literal neighbors – the ones next door to us? Do you know their joys, their concerns, their names? We’ll show you how, while you are stuck at home, to share God’s love who live right around you.

Why does Moses require them to reopen and write God’s Graffiti on their hearts? He knows they will be tested in the Promised Land without him. The deeper these words are written on their hearts, the more they will do the right thing when the time comes. You are going to be tested. When you hear or see racism, will you be silent or stand up and speak the truth with love? Will you be silent or stand up for people even if they are different in belief, in looks, in lifestyle? When people ask you questions about God, will you be silent or stand up and tell the Truth about Jesus with love? Will you do the right thing when the time comes?

There was a little village named Le Chambon in France. Author Philip Haille learned when France surrendered to the Nazis, the people of this little village hid their Jewish neighbors. Haille was curious about how so many courageous heroes were willing to risk everything to perform this extraordinary act, this conspiracy of goodness. He interviewed the townsfolk but he found nothing remarkable about them. In fact, he was struck by their ordinariness. They weren’t especially courageous or unique.

After a time, Haille discovered the one factor that united them was their attendance, Sunday after Sunday, at their little church, where they heard the Word of God preached by Pastor Andre Trochme. Over time, they became, by habit, people who just knew what to do and did it. When it came time for them to be courageous, the day the Nazis came to town, they quietly did what was right. Over time, the little village sheltered 5000 Jewish adults and children. No one was turned away. No one was turned in.

One old woman, who faked a heart attack when the Nazis came to search her house, later said, “Pastor always taught us that there comes a time in every life when a person is asked to do something for Jesus. When our time came, we knew what to do.”

Let God write His graffiti in the very best place...your heart.