

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"Showdown at Mount Carmel"

Scripture: 1 Kings 18:[17-19] 20-39

Opening Hymn: Oh worship the King 313

Closing Hymn: I have decided to follow Jesus 570

Children's Hymn: 648 I'm gonna live so God can use me

National Anthem: O Canada 800 (insert—updated lyrics)

Choruses: What a beautiful name,

Rev. Steve Filyk

November 10, 2019

Remembrance Sunday

Do you remember the first commandment?

The first of that group of ten commandments
that God gave the people
that God rescued them from Egypt?

The first of that series of rules which was given to keep us free.

Do you remember the first commandment?

"You shall have no other gods before me."ⁱ
No other gods, just me.

So now that you know it,
how well do you keep it?

Let me help you complete a quick spiritual inventory.
Just answer the following three questions:

1. What do you spend more time studying:
 - a. your bank statements or scripture?

2. What is your first response to a crisis:

- a. to make a list
- b. to pour yourself a drink
- c. or to say a prayer.

3. Are you more concerned about:

- a. your children (or grandchildren's) education
- b. or their journey of faith?

These are revealing questions.

They help us see what we might not otherwise notice.

Let me ask you a second time.

How well do you keep the first commandment?

God's people have always had a tough time

Keeping God at the center of their world,
at the center of their trust.

Just consider today's Bible lesson.

Today we are back in the story about the nation of Israel.

You will recall that a couple weeks ago

I contrasted the leadership of Rehoboam and Jesus.

Rehoboam lost the support of the northern tribes

By his self-serving leadership style.

During his watch, the unified kingdom of Judah
And the northern tribes split.

The northern tribes rejected Rehoboam and backed Jeroboam instead.

Jeroboam ruled the north and was succeeded by his son Nadab.

Nadab was overthrown by Baasha.

Baasha was succeeded by his son Elah.

Elah was overthrown by Zimri,
Who was overthrown by Omri,

Who was succeeded by Ahab.

Ahab is the king of the northern tribes
that we meet in today's reading.

Now as the rapid succession of rulers suggests,

All is not well in Israel.

And when it comes to the religious life of the northern tribes
much is in disarray.

The people are not worshipping God alone,

The God who rescued them from Egypt.

They are also worshipping the gods of the peoples around
them.

When king Ahab marries Jezebel, a Sidonian princess,

she convinces Ahab "to worship Baal in addition to [the Lord].

Baal was the head of the Canaanite pantheon

and was a specialist in fertility,

which included being the god of rain, dew,
thunder, and lightning."ⁱⁱ

Baal worship is introduced to Israel
And a temple for Baal is established in Samaria.ⁱⁱⁱ

And so the “people [are] not worshipping [the Lord] as he desired.
They [are combining] the worship of the true God
with the worship of Baal, a false God.

The people of Israel [are] falling into the [polytheistic practises]
of the people of the broader Near East...

They simply grafted the worship of Baal onto the worship of [God].

However, [the Lord] is a “jealous God” (Exod. 20:5);
he does not want to be one among the many,
he [wants] to be the one and the only
ultimate concern of their lives.”^{iv}

Into this situation the Lord sends Elijah,
Who announces to king Ahab:
“As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve,
there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years
except at my word.”^v

Elijah makes this announcement,
And the heavens are stopped;
a famine spreads across the land.

Three years later Elijah encounters an angry Ahab
Who has been struggling to find feed for the royal cattle.

Elijah proposes a contest between Baal and the Lord God
And calls Ahab to assemble the people.

You may not have caught those words that Elijah spoke
To that assembly he called together.

“How long will you waver between two opinions?
[How long are you going to sit on the fence?]
If the Lord is God, follow him;
but if Baal is God, follow him.’

[We are told that in response] the people said nothing.”^{vi}

Elijah then proposes that contest that we have already heard about.
Both Elijah and the priest of Baal will set up altars to their gods.
The god who sends fire to light up the offering
Will be declared winner:

the one whom the people will serve.

It is interesting to note that both the famine and that contest
Are a deliberate and cheeky challenges to Baal’s power.

Baal is the ‘weather god’ that has been unable
To open up the skies
and avert a three-year famine.

Baal is the ‘weather god’.
“He is a specialist at throwing fire (lightening from heaven.)

[In] one well-known ancient artistic representation of Baal,
he stands upright throwing an object
that is best interpreted as lightning.

If Baal can do anything at all, he can light this altar fire.^{vii}

But what happens?

The priests of Baal can't seem to get their god's attention.
Even when they call out all morning.
Even when they cut themselves with knives.

But after Elijah builds an altar
soaks it with water,
and utters a short two-sentence prayer
God sends fire from heaven;

Fire that vaporises the sacrifice,
the wood, the stones, and even the surrounding soil.

In response to this magnificent display
The people shout together:
"The Lord—he is God!
The Lord—he is God!"

It's a great story meant to expose
Baal and all other gods as pretenders.

It's a great story meant to remind us
That the Lord, the Lord alone is God.

Of course, you may be thinking to yourself,
Sure old Baal was a pretender.
Nothing but a lifeless idol that the people served.

But why label cash and education and work as idols?

‘I depend on my money.
My study and my industry afford me a good lifestyle
Allowing me to provide for my family,
even support this church.’

So why disparage these gifts as idols?
Why not acknowledge their good?

The truth is that money and work and education
Are all good things in themselves.
But even gifts like spouses and families
don’t deserve the place we always give them.

They certainly don’t deserve the place of God.

Just consider money.

Money is something that many people worship,
Many people trust in.

I remember one person telling me that it is easier
To trust in their bank balance,
than to trust in Jesus.

Money is a good thing that affords us numerous blessings.
We use it to pay our mortgage,
Buy our groceries,
and take our kids (and grandkids) out for a treat.

Money can keep us clothed and well-fed
But it won't give us ultimate fulfillment.

Research shows that "once people are earning around \$75000 a year,
Making more money has no impact at all
On their day-to-day feelings of happiness."^{viii}

Money can also provide access
To all sorts of skills and resources.
And yet all the money in the world cannot give us health.
Just consider Steve Jobs.

Steve Jobs was the cofounder of Apple
and was one of the youngest people
Ever on Forbes list of richest people in the USA
[without inheriting money].

But being a billionaire couldn't save him from cancer.
Jobs died when he was only 56 years old.^{ix}

As for money benefiting us in the afterlife.
Well you don't see any hearses with roof-racks or trailers.
You can't take any of it with you.

Money can provide for a lot of things
But it can't guarantee the best things.
The best things in life are free
Flowing from the hands of a generous and loving God.

Comedian and actor Jim Carrey is quoted as saying
"I think everybody should get rich and famous
and do everything they ever dreamed of
so they can see that it's not the answer."

Carrey is saying money is not the answer.
It is not worth giving all our trust.

So what or who is worth trusting?

And what do the Lord God say before he gave
That first commandment?
"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt,
out of the land of slavery."^x

So what or who is worthy trusting?
A God who saves and rescues would be a good candidate.

Jesus said: I came so [you] can have real and eternal life,
more and better life than [you] ever dreamed of.^{xi}

I hope you enjoy the gift of money,
But don't put your trust in it.

I hope you put your hands to good work,
Acquiring new skills and talents,
But don't depend on them.

I hope you take advantage of the many opportunities for education,
But don't ever think that a degree or diploma
Is more valuable than your relationship with God.

In the first commandment we are told:
"No other gods, just me."
The Lord wants us to know that God alone is reliable.

God will never falter.
God is worthy of all our faith and confidence.

Amen.

ⁱ Exodus 20:3 NIV

ⁱⁱ Tremper Longman III "Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts* 233

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Kings 16:30ff

^{iv} Tremper Longman III "Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts* 234

^v 1 Kings 17:1

^{vi} 1 Kings 18:21 NIV

^{vii} Tremper Longman III "Second Sunday after Pentecost, Year C" *The Lectionary Commentary: the Old Testament and Acts* 234

^{viii} Dunn, Elizabeth; Norton, Michael. *Happy Money: The Science of Smarter Spending*. Simon & Schuster. Kindle

Edition.

^{ix} Jess Bolluyt "How Rich Was Steve Jobs? How Co-Founding Apple Affected His Net Worth" January 31, 2019

<https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/what-was-steve-jobs-net-worth.html/>

^x Exodus 20:1 NIV

^{xi} John 10:10 MSG