Fidelity to Life and Others

Centenary United Methodist Church
Sept. 18, 2022

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

We're exploring the 10 Commandments, though probably a little differently than you have before. Rather than take them one at a time, we're grouping them together by subject.

Let's read the first two together:

1. You must have no other gods before me.
2. Do not make an idol for yourself.

Together, those tell us to make God our top priority in our lives — ahead of your job, yourself and, yes, even your family.

Let's read the next two together:

3. Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance.

4. Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy.

Together, the third and fourth commandments tell us to honor God.

Then last, week, the fifth commandment taught us — let's say it together:

5. Honor your father and your mother.

This is the transition. The first four were about prioritizing and honoring God — to set our lives straight. The fifth shifts to those we should honor here on earth.

Today, we'll start in on the second half of the 10 commandments with a look at two commandments that should be rather easy for us. The verses are short, so let's dive right in to Exodus 20:13-14.

> **13** "You shall not murder.
>
> **14** "You shall not commit adultery.

Let's say them together.

6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and understanding of scripture.

These next two commandments, when put together, challenge us to embrace the concept of fidelity. The definition of fidelity includes:

- The strict observance of duty or promises.
- Loyalty.
- Faithfulness.

We'll take the seventh commandment against adultery first, because that's the one that we most often use this definition of "fidelity" with.

This can be a difficult subject, so we won't dwell on it too long. But there is no doubt that sex is a challenge for many people.
Don't think so? Just look at primetime TV and movies and advertisements.

Just about every police show has used sex as the reason for a crime in at least one of its episodes — a reason for theft, a reason for blackmail, or a reason for murder, which we'll talk about in more detail in just a few minutes.

Entire movies have plotlines centered on this physical act.

And there is absolutely no doubt that sex sells. Most TV ads don't star people who look like me, for example. Usually, it's a curvy woman or a guy with a six pack — not beer, but abs.

I've heard sex put this way: "It can be enormously wondrous, but it also can be enormously dangerous."

The commandment is clearly meant to do a few things:

- First, it is meant to preserve marriages — God's chosen way of grouping people together who love each other to serve as the heads of families.

    - Specifically, the commandment was meant to guard against violation of the wife of another man. That definition has been expanded quite a bit over the centuries, but I think we all know what this means:
        - Don't cheat on someone to whom you have made a promise.
        - Fidelity.
- Second, it's meant to showcase the kinds of relationships God wants for each of us — loving, lasting partnerships.
    - God wants relationships for us that are:
        - Life-giving
        - Life-fulfilling
        - Nurturing
        - Enhancing
        - And Respectful

None of those things can happen if the marriage vows have been broken or if people involved don't take them seriously.
Just as those first four commandments were meant to show honor to God, this one is clearly meant to show honor to the people we love.

Back to those TV shows. In almost every case — at least in the shows I've watched — an act of infidelity almost always leads to a murder that has to be solved.

- Either out of revenge
- Or to hide something

And that's because those things happen in real life.
Throw in drugs and expensive property and valuables, and you have all you need for an equation that pushes someone to end the life of someone else.

How frequent is it?

- In 2021, almost 20,000 people in the United States were killed by someone else.
- In Kansas City, Missouri, alone we had 157 murders.
    - 244 for the entire metro area, which includes Lawrence.

It's just senseless, and we know we shouldn't do it.
Thankfully, most people don't.

And there is a key word in that commandment: “Murder.”
Your favorite Bible translation may say “Kill.”

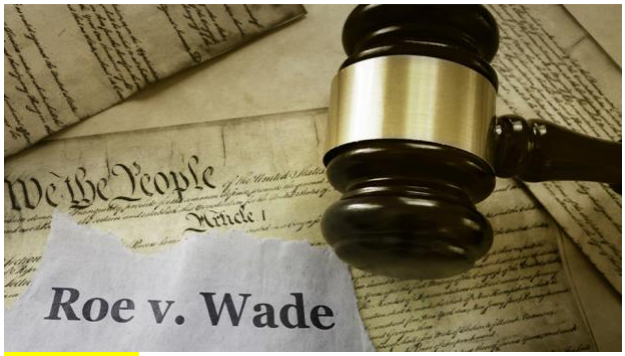
Which is it? Kill or murder? I’m not really sure. The Orthodox Jewish Bible uses “murder.” Many others do too. But many other translations use “kill.”

Is there a difference? I truly don’t know, and I think it’s OK to wrestle with it.
I don’t think human life is something that should be so easily dismissed.

Think of the scenarios where people may use those words about killing or murder.

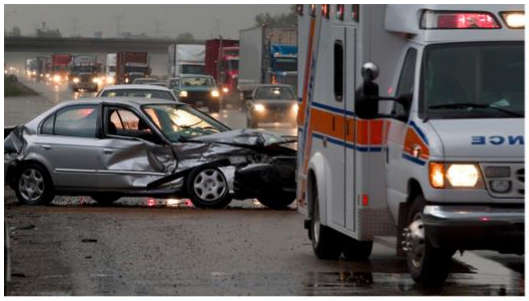
- Revenge — Someone has severely hurt or killed someone you love.
- Protection — Someone is threatening a loved one, maybe with a gun or knife, and you step in to save them, but it results in the person who was making the threat being harmed.
- But then there are more difficult debates about murder/kill:

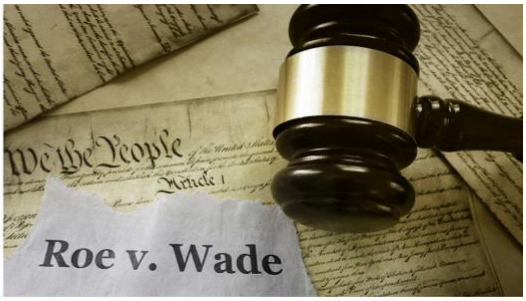
  - Accidents — What if you have a tire blow out on your car, you swerve and hit another vehicle, killing someone inside? Is that murder?

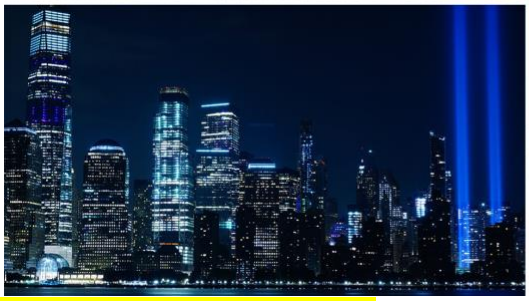


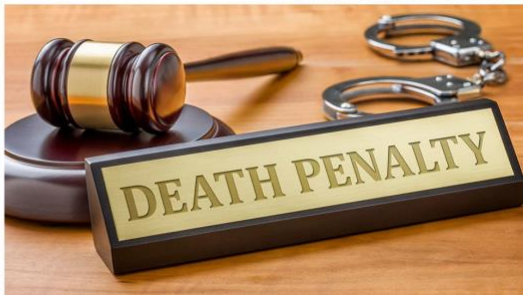
  - Abortion — We just had a big election in Kansas over this concern. Is abortion murder? How about if the mother would die without that procedure? What about that scenario?

- War — Is there any such thing as a "just war"? We seemed as a country to justify going to war in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terror attacks to track down al-Qaida and then the Taliban, so maybe those were justified because those organizations trained terrorists. But what about Iraq, which was proven not to have any role in the attacks?
  - And is that loss of life the fault of soldiers or of politicians? Or both?









- How about capital punishment — Some would say people who kill someone else deserve to die. But Jesus said to forgive. And did you know almost 200 people have been freed from death row after being exonerated?
  - How many innocent people have we executed?

I'm not trying to make any political statements about abortion, or about war, or about the death penalty.
What I am saying is that these are deeply critical discussions that should cause us to squirm a bit when we discuss them. Perhaps they should make us doubt, just a bit, or at least pause before answering yes or now to the question of "is it murder?" Because God has been very clear that life is precious.

I think these discussions should make us uneasy.
After all, few things in recorded history have led to more bloodshed and death than religion.

Our own savior, Jesus Christ himself, was wrongly convicted thanks to trumped up charges by religious leaders who wanted to protect their lot in life, so they had an innocent man hung on a cross.

Luckily, there is forgiveness, even on these weighty subjects.
There is a story in the Bible that wraps up the concepts of adultery and murder into one incredibly compelling narrative.
You may know it well, but I'm going to close today by telling it to you.

It' the story of David and Bathsheba.

- King David is spending a pleasant night on the roof of the palace — an outdoor entertainment space, no doubt.
- He looks down at the house next door, or maybe one over, and he sees a woman bathing. He's immediately "in lust" with her.
- David finds out that this is Bathsheba, the wife of one of his trusted military officers, Uriah. And Uriah happens to be away fighting a battle on behalf of King David.
- David sends for her anyway.
    - We don't know if she willingly cheated on her husband.
    - Some biblical scholars believe David may have raped her or at the very least coerced her by using his power and position — very much a #MeToo moment in the Bible.
- Bathsheba becomes pregnant with David's baby.

Now, David needs a cover-up.

- He sends for Uriah to come back from the front lines. He wants Uriah to spend the night with his wife, to cover up the pregnancy and affair with David.
- But Uriah is a man of high quality and character. He says if his men can't be home with their loved ones, he can't spend the night with his wife. So Uriah sleeps in a doorway.
- David doesn't know what to do. How will he cover up this example of infidelity?
- He writes a note, seals it, and sends it back with Uriah himself.

What on earth is David doing?

- The note orders the general to send Uriah ahead, to the front of the battle.
- When Uriah is engaged, the rest of the troops are to pull back, virtually guaranteeing that Uriah will be killed.

That's what happens.
It's in war, right? Is it a justified killing?

- Of course not.

David may have coerced a woman into having sexual relations with him.
David most certainly committed adultery.

And make no mistake, David ordered the murder of Uriah, and the men at the front with him.

And despite all that, God forgives David when he finally recognizes the errors of his ways. And that was the key.
David first had to humble himself and admit he had done wrong.

- How do we do with humbling ourselves and admitting we are wrong?

God still blesses David.
And God uses David as the bloodline to bring God's only son, Jesus, into the world.

I'm going to go out on a limb here and say there probably aren't too many people here or watching who have committed adultery.
I'm going to assume even fewer of you have killed or murdered someone.

But you should take some solace in this: If God can forgive a truly humbled David, then I think we can be certain that God will forgive us.
The key, though, is to be humble and to truly mean it.

- Seek forgiveness because you sinned, not because you got caught.

Do not murder.
Do not commit adultery.

Two cornerstones of how we honor one another, by recognizing all people deserve to live and by fulfilling our promises.

Fidelity to life and to others.

Amen.