

“It’s Morphing Time”

Exodus 20:1-17 Philippians 3:4-14

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October 6, 2013

Today is World Communion and Peacemaking Sunday. Christians all over the world are celebrating the Lord’s Supper. It is a wonderful sign of our unity, but how do we live in community and belonging with peace, joy and love for all?

An empty frame hangs in the lobby of the courthouse in Pulaski County, Kentucky. It is blank and void and looks rather ridiculous—but this frame of nothing remains a testimony to something that has been taken away. The frame used to contain the Ten Commandments before a U.S. District Judge ordered that the Ten Commandments be removed. There is a great deal of intensity around the issues of the posting of The Ten Commandments, school prayer, and teaching faith. As we ponder these issues the empty frame does raise for each of us the question of where the Ten Commandments belong. Perhaps it is not nearly as important to have the Ten Commandments posted as it is to strive to live them in our daily lives. We need to ask ourselves: Am I displaying the Ten Commandments clearly in my own daily words, actions, deeds, and being; or am I more of an empty frame?

Dallas Willard believes the strongest argument against Christianity is empty frame Christians and writes: “How many people are radically and permanently repelled from *The Way* by Christians who are unfeeling, stiff, unapproachable, boring, lifeless, obsessive, and dissatisfied? Yet such Christians are everywhere and what they are missing is the wholesome liveliness springing from a balanced vitality with the freedom of God’s loving rule... Spirituality wrongly understood or pursued is a major source of human misery and rebellion against God.”

In Exodus we find that God has already saved the covenant people from slavery in Egypt and now provides the Ten Commandments as a means for God’s people to live into the reality of abundant life, peace, joy, love, community, and belonging to God’s family. The Ten Commandments are to be lived not commemorated. When lived our lives reveal love for God and others bringing us all together in peace and harmony. The Ten Commandments begin with God reminding us that God has set us free. Living the Ten Commandments keeps us free, keeps us growing in love, helps us avoid slavery to hate, strife, work, fear, jealousy, unhealthy pride, and violence.

Scripture proclaims. **Exodus 20:1-17 NLT** “Then God gave the people all these instructions: “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. “You must not have any other god but me.

“You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands. “You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse God’s name. “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day God rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. “Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. “You must not murder. “You must not commit adultery. “You must not steal. “You must not testify falsely against your neighbor. “You must not covet your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s spouse, servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”

Every moment Jesus is nurturing us and setting us free from sin, so we are free to love God and all people. Some people talk about “breaking” the Ten Commandments. It is more accurate to say breaking ourselves. Each instant we fail to live the Ten Commandments we break ourselves.

A marvelous masterpiece is Michelangelo’s Pieta, a marble statue of Mary holding Jesus. Some years ago a person began smashing it with a sledgehammer. Although the damage was significant, Vatican artist were able to restore the statue.

We are God’s masterpiece. We were created to give and receive love, revealing beauty for all to enjoy. Sadly we keep breaking ourselves, breaking our relationships, breaking creation. This is why our disappointment can run so deep. We are frustrated in ourselves for not being the beautiful, loving person God created us to be. We try to be a perfect, loving child, parent, friend, spouse, neighbor, laborer, and person; but, we fall short in some many ways leaving us disappointed. Since as individuals none of us are able to love God or neighbor perfectly, it is not surprising that our churches, communities, and the entire world is filled with disappointment.

Our disappointment is a consequence of our failure to be the person God created us to be. Our frustration is a symptom of removing God from the center of

our life. The less love we have for God and all people the more we become like an empty frame. Like the restoration of the statue, God is working to restore our beauty, our harmony with all people and all of creation. God's amazing grace does more than overcome the defacing of God's image in each one of us. God is renewing us to an eternal glory way beyond our initial beauty. God's amazing grace does more than repair broken relationships. God is weaving us together into a tapestry where all belong, complement one another, and together reveal a masterpiece far beyond any one thread. So our story is not one of just universal disappointment but also one of abounding hope.

Frederick Buechner observed how every age has produced fairy tales. We keep spinning and repeating stories of another world, where the characters are transformed. Frogs become princes, ugly ducklings become swans, a wooden toy becomes a real boy. These are all features; Buechner says that the gospel is similar to fairy tales with this one great difference: The gospel is true.

Pastor John Ortberg developed a short liturgy. He would say "It's morphing time." The congregation would reply, "We shall morph indeed." The term morph first gained popularity with the TV show *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*. The key to the show's appeal was the characters' ability to "morph". The main characters were ordinary, confused teenagers but as needed they could access power beyond themselves to become martial arts heroes for justice. Their rally cry in crisis was, "It's morphing time!" and they would be transformed with the ability to do extraordinary things. The desire to morph is in every person. This is why people enter therapy, join health clubs, get into recovery groups, read self-help books, attend motivational seminars, and make New Year's resolutions for the possibility of morphing.

Ortberg points out that morph's Greek root were a favorite of the Apostle Paul and means "the inward and real formation of the essential nature of a person." It was the term used to describe the formation and growth of an embryo in the womb. Paul used this word when he wrote to the Galatians: "until Christ is formed in you."--until Christ is born in us, until we express God's character, goodness and love in our whole being we are infants. Life is a kind of spiritual gestation process. We are pregnant with possibilities of beauty, glory, love, and unity so great we cannot even image it.

Paul used another form of morph when he told the Romans that God longs for us to be "conformed to the image of Jesus." This word means to have the same form as another, to shape into a durable likeness. Spiritual growth is a morphing process.

Still another form of morph is when Paul urged us not to be conformed to the world around us but to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds." This root gave birth to the English word metamorphosis. A creeping caterpillar

undergoes metamorphosis into a soaring butterfly—yet as the children of God we are to undergo a morph so grand in makes the butterfly look ordinary.

These are bold truths of what is coming. God is morphing us into beautiful people. God is morphing us into one loving community. Today we celebrate these bold truths by gathering around the Lord's Table and celebrating world communion. It is a holy mysterious table for the Holy Spirit unites us in love with people beyond space--people all around the world; the Holy Spirit unites us in love with people beyond time—people who lived before us and people who will live after us. During this holy mysterious meal God's amazing grace permeates us, we are set free to love, you may even perceive a foretaste of your future glory and rejoice in harmony with God and all people. The celebration of World Communion Sunday is a mere foretaste of glorious union and morphing that is coming.

The Apostle Paul wrote of his personal morphing. **Philippians 3:4-14 NLT**
“Though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more! I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault. I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Godself depends on faith. I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead. I want to suffer with him, sharing in his death, so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead! I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me. No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.”

Jesus is morphing us. Jesus challenged the religious leaders with all their studying of the law, definitions of the law, framing and commemorating the law for it was making them increasingly dead to love, therefore missing the intent of the law. Jesus affirmed the prostitutes and tax collectors who were striving to live

the law, to love, to morph into an ever more beautiful person. It is a strange irony-- the righteous can be more damaged by their righteousness than sinners by their sins.

Perhaps there would be more peace, community, and unity around the world if we spent less time debating and trying to frame a scripture, doctrine, or belief and more time loving. Perhaps we would radiate more of the beauty God is nurturing in us if we spent less time pointing out the flaws and defacing one another and more time pointing out the goodness God is doing in each other thereby building each other up.

God morphed the Apostle Paul giving him focus, a striving, to become like Christ. Paul believed in the morphing power of God, resurrection from the dead and an awaiting heavenly prize. We morph not by beating ourselves up over the past, or pointing out flaws, or creating and enforcing laws; rather, by receiving God's morphing power and loving.

Today we celebrate morphing time for we will not remain empty frames, smashed statues and lonely threads. God is morphing us into fine portraits, magnificent statues and grand tapestries. We will not remain fragmented people. God is morphing us into one inclusive loving family where all belong, shine and complement each other. God is morphing us into a community of peace, love and joy. Amen