

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Our baptismal promise for this morning is “Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?”

I have to say,

at first glance this looked like I might want to drop the scripture all together,
and just talk about how we might proclaim the Good News.

But the preacher in me saw this move as the easy way out
and a shirking of my preaching duty,

so I decided to take the challenge and do the best I could.

So what are we to make of God in these lessons today?

Where is the Good News for us to proclaim?

One thing we might get out of them
is that God can be frightening.

Now I know this is a simple thing
and probably a little unsettling when you get right down to it,
but it is, I think, an important observation.

If we were to continue the reading from Exodus for a few more verses
it would go like this.

“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, and said to Moses,

‘You speak to us, and we will listen;

but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.’”

This encounter speaks to us of the great truth

that God can be frightening, and is often unapproachable and confusing,

and, I suspect, that there are a whole lot of people
who would really rather have someone else just explain it to them,
than do the hard work themselves.

That hard truth is that God is different.

Different from us,
and different from anything else we might put up in the place of God.
Different from all the gods that came before,
and all the gods that have come since.

Our promise to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ,
demands that we make that difference clear.

That is why the news is Good.

Good, but not easy.

That difference was laid out on Mt. Sinai
after the Hebrews made their covenant with God,
and God accepted them
as God's treasured possession out of all the peoples.

A kingdom of priests.

A people set apart.

As Christians we are heirs to that kingdom.

And so, like our God, we too are different,
or we should be.

I don't have time to look at them all,
but I do want to take just one of the Ten Commandments,
the second one,

and spend some time with it
looking at how it separates and defines God,
and how it separates and defines us.

But more importantly
I want to use it as an example

of how we might proclaim by both word and example,
that very difference;
that Good News.
I have chosen the second commandment
because God spends more time and words
explaining this one commandment than any of the other ten,
so I suppose God just might think it is the most important.
Or it could be that since it isn't the first commandment
and God still spends all these words explaining it,
it just needs more explanation than any of the other commandments.
Either way, I think it's a good choice.
Before I go into the details
we should probably spend a little time
reviewing the ten commandments as a whole.
You want to remember that the ten commandments are the essence of the Law.
All of the book of Leviticus and Deuteronomy
are just the fine teeth of the comb that begins as the ten commandments.
And I also think it is important to remember
that the Hebrews see the Law in a very different way than we do.
"The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul,"
says the psalmist.
The Hebrews write love poetry to the Law.
"More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb."
They love the Law as deeply as they love God.
As Christians,
when we get lazy
we are prone to think of the law as negative and inhibiting
and that Jesus came to free us

from this limiting, cold, hard, impersonal Law.
We forget that Jesus came not to abolish the law but to fulfill the law.
That in Jesus we see the ultimate incarnation of God's law.
The ten commandments on two legs, if you will.
As you approach your own attempts at proclamation of the Good News,
never forget
that the love of God for us revealed in the body of Jesus Christ
is no less potent
than the love of God for us
revealed in the ten commandments.
Now back to the one commandment we are working with today.
You remember the second commandment,
"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.
You shall not bow down to them or worship them..."
On Mt Sinai
God made it clear that when the Hebrews left Egypt
they were to leave the idols of Egypt behind as well.
God wanted to be sure that the Hebrews knew
that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob
was not like any of the gods they had known in Egypt,
or any of the gods they would meet when they entered the Promised Land.
The Lord God made all the heavens and the earth
and they are good,
but they are not to be worshiped as gods,
they are to be cared for because they are God's.
The glory is God's and should remain God's.

As the story continues, you remember,
the Hebrews forget this commandment fairly quickly
when Moses leaves them alone to go up the mountain to talk to God.
It would be nice to think
that that was what those foolish Hebrews did back then
and we would never do anything that stupid...
but it wouldn't be the truth.

We do the same thing today,
only we're a little more subtle about it.
A little, but not a lot.

So here is the hard question that God is asking us this morning.
If we truly want to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ,
then our words and our actions must inform and compliment each other,
so that the message we proclaim
will have the power and authority it needs.

This third baptismal promise more than any other, demands the very best of us.
Word and example means we must *be the Good News we proclaim*,
at all times, whether we open our mouths or not.

So, for instance, when it comes to God's second commandment,
merely speaking of the danger of idols
in the lives of those around us is not enough.

We must look diligently in our own lives as well,
and ask ourselves the hard question.

What are the idols that we have allowed to come between us and God?

What do we trust in before, or instead of God?

Is it wealth, or health, or safety, or guns, or even life itself?

All are good things given by God,

but have we twisted them into ultimate ends;

have they become idols we metaphorically bow to and sacrifice to

and worship instead of God?

If you are feeling a little uncomfortable,
you should be,
but do not be afraid.

Remember the second baptismal promise,
the one we didn't get to look at because we had a guest preacher last week.

“Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever
you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?”

God loves you passionately and even irrationally.

You need only repent and return to the Lord,
and all will be forgiven.

Look in your life
for the idols that have slipped into the church of your soul.

It is so easy for them to slide in the side door.

What have become the greater goods in your life.

What do you sacrifice your time,
your money,
and your energy for?

This is hard work, but it is good work.

It is pursuit of the Good News.

Look closely and honestly.

And then if it isn't God,
bend the knee of your heart and ask for forgiveness
and rearrange your life.

Do it now.

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

I will with God's help.

Amen.