

Sermon 8 March 2015
Exodus 20:1-17 Psalm 19 'The Wonders of God'

Prayer: *May the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and redeemer. Amen.*

This is the - should I say “**THE**” picture the Herald felt showed ‘Auckland’ – in a lead article about how Auckland is 3rd in the world in the Mercer's global Quality of Living Index. And this second picture is the one ‘Stuff’ used about the same story! Night and Day? Both are great pictures, we do live in a blessed land – the creativeness of our God is wonderful!

However we see things – according to this (MGQOLI) ranking, Auckland for the third time is in the top 10 places in the world to send your employees – *if* you are a multinational employer with a global workforce on international assignments.

The Index uses 14 factors to measure a city some of which are – Transport, Housing, Life-style, Jobs and Economy, Environment.... Our way of living fits into 14 measurements and we're not that badly off, living within them all. *Well we might say* – we're pretty good in our living, with our lifestyles – **but** is that all we could be measured by? Is that all we want to be measured by? Is this what we should be measuring our lives by?

At least that's *one place* my reflecting on this took me. And then I faced the Bible readings for us this week, and laughed when I realised what the world took 14 to do – God does in 10!!! There is *some* common ground but the differences are much greater. They both start with a basis of quality of life. The ‘worldly’ one then measures ‘things’ to determine what makes life have good quality – and God measures **relationships**.

The measure of the quality of our life is declared in both the Psalm and the Exodus version of the ‘10 Words’ of God. This is the title in Hebrew of the chapter containing what we would usually call the 10 Commandments. We will get to the Psalm's declarations in a while – for now I want to expand on the 10 Words from God about relationships that measure the quality of our life.

There is a little background to the gift of these that I think is important, they are given to one man, **Moses** who climbed up a mountain. The people didn't go – it was far too dangerous – and mysterious! To get that close to God - - it was definitely not for the ordinary – until Jesus! ^{*1} These 10 words are understood as representing all the laws / the totality of the law. But before we get too carried away thinking about this from our times – it is important to remember that for the ancients peoples the ^{*1} “Law was not simply a means to limit and direct human behaviour so that equity and justice could be experienced by everyone and that peace might prevail. Law in the Old Testament always had a theological aspect to it.”

H Wallace says “Law was always thought of as being of divine origin and was intended to order human society so that it functioned in a way consistent with the divine will and ordering of the whole cosmos. In other words, law was seen as part of creation itself. Just as there were ‘natural’ limits and behaviours set within the cosmos itself, so law set these limits within human society. And just as creation was intended to offer life to all, so law was given that people may prosper in a long life (see Deut 6:1-3; 30:19 etc). The law or torah (also ‘teaching’) is therefore an instrument of mutual relationship in which the faith of the people responds to the love and grace of God. And because it is based in, **grows out of** the relationship between God and people – this is why we follow, and promise to do our best to keep it.

One of the dangers of “laws” is that some folk want to take them literally, and certainly within the history of Christianity incredible damage has been done, judgements made, and claims cast about legalism without grace... It's another wonder of God to me that the ‘10 words’ we heard today is the Exodus

^{*1} H Wallace,

version – and it **differs** from the version found in Deuteronomy (5) Surely this is a warning to look deep into the ‘Word’ of God and **never stop**, because just over the page God has something new to reveal – on what might be the exact same topic! For us today both versions say that the laws came after the people learnt that God travelled with them – always – in all ways! After God led them out of slavery and – saved them from armies, famine, disease.... Themselves! After all this they began to understand that God meant to stay with them – no matter what, isn’t that a wonderful discovery – every time? cV

It is one of the wonders of God to me that our biblical laws are a response to love poured out; are a response to God’s heart’s desire for friendship – best of friends with each and every one of us that the best living conditions to make this a reality are the ‘10 Words’ of Exodus that we heard today. We can sort the ‘10 Words’ roughly into three sets. 1 is about the relationship of God and people – it covers the first 4 commandments;

2. The next two are about the maintaining the relationship through Sabbath Rest with self and all of creation – all of creation – **hear the echo** of the tight bond between law and land / law and all people not just those who speak your language / law and the animals given into our care????? Law is not only for those in power in human to human relationships – but for **all** on the **earth**. Perhaps it is a wonder of God that Rest, Sabbath rest is a key value allowing balance, equity, a centring of relationships, good living!

3. The last six are about right living with one another – if you want quality of life – then follow these, perhaps expanding them to increase our understanding and to fit our language and **we’d** be the top of the world listings! cV

So is the quality of life measured by the ‘things’ in it? Exodus’s ‘10 Words’ say ‘No’ and set beside them for us today is Psalm 19. C.S. Lewis has said of Psalm 19 ‘I take this to be the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.’ – and I would agree, it has long been a favourite of mine – especially because of the delightful way it shares the laws of God. It is a good balance with the Exodus laws because they are all put negatively “You shall NOT...” And there’s the picture of them being written in stone – how unchanging and ‘soft’ or loving or... is stone?

The psalm has a completely different approach – it sings passionately about how the law of God is: ‘is perfect, sure, right, clear, pure, enduring, true and altogether righteous. It revives, makes wise, rejoices the heart, and enlightens the eyes.’^{*1} It says the law of God is more than just a few rules saying ‘no’ to some behaviours – It says God’s law or teaching is a delight and is to affect the whole of our life in good, healthy and joy filled ways. These “words” truly give life – and that’s what they were designed to do.

To the ancients, honey was the sweetest and very highly prized, everyone wanted it! So in vs 10 the psalmist tries to describe how much we want to live according to God’s ways, teachings, rules – how much do we want it? More than the sweetest honey because it brings life – sweet life to us! God’s Torah – teachings, laws **give life**, but they exist / were made / given not just for our benefit. The laws / teachings / Torah has its own intrinsic^{*1} value for both what it does and what it is.

The idea of the law holding its own value links back to the opening verses of the psalm – about the beauty and wonders of God’s creation. It links back to the ancients understanding that as God created everything, the law is part of all that was created. The psalm talks about how the^{*1} knowledge of God is embedded in the world so that everything can be seen and nothing can be hidden from its searching rays (v. 6), - and here’s the personal application: As the knowledge of God is embedded in the world so it is in our lives! It is in our lives we must let law and its teachings become embedded so we do them, follow them without thinking – follow them as easily as we breathe.

It is not a ‘must do’ or ‘duty’ or ... to live but a response to what has been created and given **to** us – **for** us as a way to live with divinely inspired quality in our lives. I would say the wonders of God’s activity in the world and in us is a miracle – right? Amen

^{*1} H Wallace,