

## Five Lost Commandments

Mark 12:35-40

When Moses descended from the heights of Mount Sinai, he juggled in his arms not two but three Tablets of the Covenant, with five commandments inscribed on each. At least that's how Mel Brooks tells it in his classic comedy "History of the World, Part I."

'Hear me, o hear me! All pay heed!' the movie Moses proclaims. 'The Lord, the Lord Jehovah, has given unto you these fifteen . . . [One stone tablet drops and shatters. A perplexed Moses looks down and mutters 'Oy!'] . . . ten, TEN commandments for all to obey!'

Of course, it never really happened that way. But what if it had? What if God had originally meant to give us fifteen commandments, and one tablet containing five was dropped, shattering on the ground? What would those five lost commandments have been? And if I was to ask what the other five might be, we'd all have a different list.

So this morning, I want to share my list. It's a very personal list of what would have been on the third tablet.

Growing up in New Jersey one of the great fall traditions was jumping head first or running full speed into a huge raked up pile of leaves. Nothing is more "fully fall" than filling your face and nose with the scruff and scent of a rainbow pile of leafy leftovers. Leaf piles, piles of the past glory of summer's sweetness, are worth inhaling with our body and our souls.

Other piles, and our compulsion to create them, are not as worthy or rewarding. Our culture of "too much is never enough" believes in "piling it up," no matter what the cost to people, the environment, or our souls.

Take, for example, our gospel reading this morning in which Jesus specifically warns all disciples about the inherent dangers of "piling." The Scribes he lambasts parade a puffy parody of piety. Instead of working to examine and explain the daily importance of the Torah for pious, observant Jews, these Scribes were all about the "walk" — and not the "talk."

From "flowing robes" (with long, elegant prayer shawls made from the finest linens, sporting the lengthiest corner fringes) to first-class "sports-box" tickets they enjoyed at public banquets and in the synagogue, these religious bureaucrats were all about the flash and the cash. The truth and practice of the Torah was buried far beneath everything else they piled up.

When Jesus denounced the ostentatious behavior of these Scribes he was denouncing their behavior in first century Jerusalem, yes. But he was also exposing the common shallowness and self-centeredness that pervades all of us, everywhere, even today. And the urge to splurge on "piles" is stronger than ever today in our consumer, commercial and celebrity centered culture.

So, again, indulge me as I share my list of the "lost five" commandments. Each one begins with "Thou Shalt Not Pile."

Commandment #11 - **Thou Shalt Not Pile Up.** The Scribes whom Jesus accuses of “devouring widow’s houses” were “piling up” — taking advantage of the weakest and most vulnerable to add to their own already considerable wealth and status.

I’m sure none of us can think of any twenty-first century example of such behavior. Like CEO’s who bail out with a “golden parachute” while hundreds of employees lose their jobs. Or international investors who reap huge profits in other countries without concern for the lives of the cheap laborers they exploit.

No matter how many “earthly treasures” we “pile up,” it never seems to be enough. No matter how much wealth we have, we never seem to reach a saturation point or find true contentment.

Only the “poor widow” in today’s text seems to be immune to the urge to “pile up.” Her faith was not in any thing she possessed — or didn’t possess. She gives away the tiny amount she has because it does not possess her. Her faith was piled up in heaven, not in things on earth. Thou shalt not pile up.

Commandment #12 - **Thou Shalt Not Pile On.** There was a time when we were taught “Don’t kick somebody when they’re down.” Or “don’t pile on.” Whether disgraced, downtrodden, or bedraggled, “piling on” was bad manners, poor sportsmanship, and just plain un-Christian.

But times have changed. It seems that “piling on” is now a national pastime. Whether it’s a Hollywood celebrity, a political powerhouse, or a sports star who stumbles and falls from grace, we can’t wait to “pile on” our own jeers and judgment to the public criticism and condemnation.

Few things are more sickening today than these pile-ons, especially the way even Christians jump on people who are down and not yet proven guilty. We used to give people the benefit of the doubt. Now we give them a kick in the stomach while they’re down on the ground.

The moment Jesus arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem and began teaching, he was “piled on” by the Sanhedrin. That “big boys club” of Sadducees, Scribes, and Pharisees each took aim at Jesus and piled on their accusations. They had no interest in anything Jesus was teaching. They plied on with questions lobbed at him in hopes of tripping him up, pulling him down, and piling on in full public view.

Jesus foiled their plan by answering them in unexpected ways. The Sanhedrin “big boys” couldn’t argue with his answers. But Jesus himself never took advantage when he bested his challengers. He never piled on after making his point.

When Jesus was confronted with the “life-and-death” question about the woman accused of adultery, he refused to pile on. His words, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” caused those warming up their pitching arms in the bull pen to slink off. Thou shalt not pile on.

Commandment #13 - **Thou Shalt Not Pile In.** There is an ageless expression, “piling in the bandwagon.” A lively, noisy, attention grabbing “band wagon” drew people to it, encouraging everyone to pile in with the crowd, no matter what kind of music was being played. After all, if everyone else was on board, surely it was a good idea.

The old-fashioned “band wagon” continues today with daily reports of what is electronically “trending,” or being “tweeted” around. We happily “pile in” and go along for a ride, wherever the wave of public opinion is heading. We humans can be such lemmings.

When Pilate asked the crowd which prisoner he should release - a convicted thief and life-long scoundrel or a pious rabbi who legally had done nothing wrong - the crowd piled in the Sanhedrin’s wagon and shouted, “Give us Barabbas!” Jesus was crucified by a crowd piling in the bandwagon.

Truth is, the crowd rarely “gets it right” and piling in without thinking, praying, and soul searching is never a good idea. Discipleship isn’t about “piling in.” Discipleship is about following through and daring to be different.

Too many Christians fear being left behind. Whereas Jesus dared his followers to be different and better. Jesus asked his disciples, “What are you doing that is different than others?” (Matthew 5:47). Thou shalt not pile in.

Commandment #14 - **Thou Shalt Not Pile Higher and Deeper.** A bad idea doesn’t get better just because it’s proclaimed louder and more often. The Nazis’ orchestrated enormous public rallies and brought crowds of hundreds of thousands to their feet chanting, “Sieg Heil.” Do you know what “Sieg Heil” means? It means “Hail Winning.” We have a whole culture that is yelling “Sieg Heil” and doesn’t even know it — piling higher and deeper with fake priorities and bunk values.

The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has bemoaned the way we “retreat from dialogue into the impregnable castle of cliché and repetition”. The piling higher and deeper of consensus cliches is what Williams calls “the flight from dialogue into self-justifying, self-perpetuating jargon ... a flight from adulthood, decision, relationship and creativity”.

We are living in a PC world. It used to be the church told you what to think and punished you if you didn’t think it. Now it’s a faceless, robe less politically correct society that tells you what to think, and punishes you if you don’t. Thou shalt not pile higher and deeper.

Commandment #15 - **Thou Shalt Not Pile Under.** People get piled under with too much busyness, too many expectations, too many commitments, too much nonsense.

We live in the fiery furnace of depression, the lion’s den of loneliness, and the whale’s belly of anxiety.

I wonder what the Apostle Paul would write today? Perhaps: “And now these three abide: depression, anxiety, and loneliness. But the greatest of these is anxiety.” We no longer live in the Age of Aquarius, but the Age of Anxiety with symptoms as diverse as anxiety attacks, anorexia, and anger. But Jesus reopens the space within us so the full range of human emotions can be expressed and addressed.

Don't believe me? Read Matthew 6:25-27: "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life?"

Not convinced? Turn to Matthew 6:34 " –Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own."

Still not convinced? Focus on Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Or John 14:27 " –Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

The phrase "fear not" appears 365 times in the Bible. One time for each day of the year. Don't you think it's time we lived by faith and not by fear?

Don't Pile Up. Don't Pile In. Don't Pile On. Don't Pile Higher and Deeper. Don't Pile Under. Be at Peace.