



PASTOR'S CORNER

We just came home from a family reunion, wedding, and an unexpected funeral. The day we had thought of coming home we received word that

Sadie's sister in law had died unexpectedly. Cheryl Crichley, our delegate to the national conference in Atlanta also returned and reported on her experience at the conference. Cheryl was very excited and pleased with the way she saw a diverse group of people seeking to find the right way to deal with difficult questions. It seems to me that our national conference meetings express the best in our denomination. We also had many good experiences, but I believe we probably saw the church more on the grass roots level than Cheryl did. Because of the funeral I missed the children's camp at Hydro. I had been asked to tell the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments. Because I did not get to share it there I will share with you in a little different form and add a little more theology than I would have for the children. I will also tell you that my meditation on the Ten Commandments in the context of hearing a variety of religious messages made me think that a part of our religious thinking is more Babylonian or Egyptian than the revolutionary expression of the Ten Commandments or the teachings of Jesus.

The story really begins with Abraham. Abraham lived in a very highly developed and prosperous land in the city of Ur. God told him to leave this land to a land I will show you. We will think about why later. Later God told Moses that he must lead the Hebrew people out of the land of Egypt where they were forced into slave labor. I have always assumed that these enslaved people were only to willing to leave Egypt. If you read the story Moses instinctively knew it was going to be difficult to persuade the Israelite people to leave Egypt for a journey into the dessert. Egypt also was a highly developed country with super power status in the world. Egypt was the bread basket of the world. In times of famine we read that people went to Egypt knowing they would find food there. From the complaints we hear on the journey it seems clear many of the people would have wanted to be liberated but stay living in this land of prosperity and great military power. Then, we ask, why should they be asked to leave. I will seek to show that in the infinite wisdom of God, they were told they must leave this land. As with Abraham before them, they were living in a highly developed economic and military society which in turn made it a very seductive society. It was understood that to move on to the revolutionary understanding of the Ten Commandments you cannot begin in the context of this seductive society.

Egyptian society was seductive not only because it was successful and powerful but they were also religious. They believed that the focus of the gods concern was with the

structures of power. They owed the gods of their country the recognition that it was they who made them this powerful force in the world, even the power to enslave others was attributed to the blessings of the gods. The king was considered a god on the earth, given this authority by the God in heaven. To gain and maintain the favor of the gods the Egyptians depended on specified rituals and sacrifices.

Now come the Ten Commandments, beginning with the strong warning against the worship of other gods followed by an equally strong warning against creating symbols of God called idols. This must have been in direct reference to the divine claims and the rituals and sacrifices they experienced in Egypt. In Egypt they saw a people being fervently religious but oblivious or indifferent to their suffering, even claiming it was by divine order that they were the masters and the children of Israel the slaves. Sounds all too familiar, doesn't it. Now the commandments move to human relations. If you wish to be assured the favor of God it will come to you when you treat your fellow humans right, not by ritual or sacrifice. Who else but a slave people would teach that it is more than a moral obligation, it is a divine law that every person and even the animal that pulls your plow must be given one day of rest in seven.

Embedded in the teaching of Jesus we find the same emphasis as in the ten commandments. Jesus also understood one cannot get to what Jesus called the kingdom of God, with our religious roots embedded in a success and power oriented society. That is what he meant when he told Nicodemus, "you must be born again". Jesus taught that one must absolutely abandon religious ritual and sacrifice and all religious activity as a substitute for the right treatment of others in order to please God. Jesus insisted we must be perfect as God is perfect. Perfect does not mean flawless but compassionate and caring about others. Giving bread to the hungry and water to the thirsty is holy living. Note: rituals can have value but not as a substitute for right treatment of your fellow humans.

Let me share a few of my thoughts. I share with Cheryl a good feeling about the leaders of our denomination. At the grass roots however I sense that from the conservative element to the liberal element our faith is being molded by living in this most prosperous and powerful society. I particularly noted how so much preaching focused on ritual acceptance of Jesus while seemingly remaining oblivious to the suffering in the world. I have this feeling, if I were really in tune with God I would hear God say, leave this land to a land I will show you. But then I do not know how to interpret that either. I hope you are all doing well and will survive this summer heat.

Moses Mast

Surviving the Life
By Sue Laws

Life is full of challenges. Circumstances or people can take away your material possessions, they can take away your money,

they can take away your health, but no one can take away the peace that comes when you walk with the Lord.

We find ourselves rushing to get things done every day. In the times that we live in, its easy to get distracted and take things for granted. When was the last time you enjoyed the sound of a newborn bird chirping outside your window, or the buds coming out on the tree down the road? Small things matter as much as the larger events in life. We all need to take time to appreciate all our many blessings.

It doesn't matter how much or how little we possess. All of us possess enough to do the Lord's will. Reach out to your neighbors and spread the joy of the blessings we've been given. We can make a difference as long as we try. Do not keep your talents hidden, share them everyday.

Trust the Lord to show you the way. Everyday, someone you come in contact with may appear to be doing fine. But maybe they are hurting - a simple smile or hug may brighten their day. Pray for the people you know and even for the people you don't know. Let everyone see the difference knowing Jesus has made in your life.

June & July Revisited

Well, you may have noticed a change in your mail. Yes, yes I know, there was no July newsletter. But here is August and hopefully

things will not conspire against us like last month.

I talked to Gabe Bliss by computer the other day. He and his family are in Minnesota working at a camp there. I asked what everyone was doing and Gabe told me they were working on hay. Don't know if they were cutting or baling, but I sure wished I was there. They will be back soon and I'm sure there will be lots to tell.

Cheryl Critchley was our delegate to Assembly 2003 in Atlanta, GA this year. She told us about it on July 13th, seems like the only fly in the ointment was deciding which speaker to hear next. There were so many really good things to hear and learn from



Joy Mennonite Church
4708 Outpost Dr
Spencer, OK 73084-2722 (405) 236-4938
Moses & Sadie Mast 771-4743

July 27th, members of our group made a trip to Pauls Valley, OK to attend a belated birthday celebration for Robert Brueckner. Robert is a good friend and we have missed seeing him, so it was wonderful to spend some time with him.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Hostetler family. Terry has had some health problems and hopefully those will be solved soon. Also, Terry and Donna's good friend Juanita Conrad has been in poor health lately. The Hostetlers are a big part of Juanita's life and we ask for your prayers in whatever may come.

Upcoming Events

Ok, short and sweet. Preaching schedule for August will be - Aug. 3rd & 31st - Karin Evans, Aug. 10th &

17th - Moses Mast, Aug 24th - Roy Evans.

Got a lovely letter from Karin just yesterday. The organization she works for, Urban Impact, is having a back to school bash for needy families in the metro area. More information can be gotten from Urban Impact at (405) 810 - 8675. They need donations of school supplies, uniforms, your bright shining face, and most importantly your time and talents. Call them, I'm sure you won't be disappointed. Speaking as a mom, trying to get kids ready for school, I can tell you that this is a very good thing. There are lots of families in Oklahoma trying to get by on tight budgets and every little bit helps. So go read Sue's article again and give it some thought.

Go check out our web-site at www.joy.us.mennonite.net I can promise you will find something of interest. If you would like to add something or make a comment, you can contact us through the web-site or e-mail Cheryl Critchley at storyweaver@swbell.net or me at mennomomg11@cox.net Make sure if you e-mail me that you use the one key and not the L key.

JOY MENNONITE CHURCH
504 NE 16TH OKC OK 73104
Sunday Services 10:00 am Sunday School 11:30
All are welcome, please join us as you are able

Nonprofit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
OKC OK
Permit No. 2545

Address Service Requested

NICOLE TABOR
117 - 21 - 135TH ST
S OZONE PARK NY 11420