

If you would, open up your Bibles to the book of Exodus, chapter 20. As you know, we've been walking through a series on the 10 commandments—one commandment each week. This week, by God's providence, we've come upon verse 13, and I'll read it for you: "You shall not murder." By God's providence we've come upon this place. I didn't pull this up out of a hat, but I don't believe in coincidence. This verse, coupled with the events of this week—I do believe that the Holy Spirit would like to speak to us through it.

As a preacher, I am told from time to time that I should not make political commentary; rather, I should expound the scriptures. But what if the scriptures make political commentary? What if the scriptures is the only way we can see this world rightly? What if it is only through looking through the lens or the keyhole of the scriptures that anything out in this world that is not visible becomes visible? What if we can only understand and properly diagnose and come to terms with and offer the Solution to this world—what if we can only do that as we look at this world through these scriptures? As I expound "You shall not murder," I want to look not only at it but through it.

Every year, the president offers his state of the union address. Most of you probably know what that is. You watched it on television, perhaps, or heard it on the radio. The state of the union: What is the condition that we find the US in? He typically diagnoses the general problems as he sees them and he gives his proposed solutions. I believe if we were to look through the keyhole of scriptures this morning, we would see the state of the union as God sees it. When we look through the scriptures to examine our world and one another and our own hearts, we'll begin to see the problems as God sees them and allow God to diagnose the problems, and we'll see the Solution. I hope this morning to look through this commandment and to diagnose what I believe the Bible teaches is the problem and to offer up what I believe to be the Solution.

It is 2016 right now, and if we were to go back in time to when my grandfather was my age, we'd be in the 20th century. If we had to think of one word to encapsulate the 20th century, what would be the word that we would offer? Advancement? Evolution? Technology? Development? What would be the one word that would encapsulate the spirit of the 20th century? As I look through the 6th commandment, a word comes to mind: "murder." In the 20th century, nearly 200 million men, women, and children were murdered. Just as we celebrated our advancements, our technology achievements, our societal evolution—just as we celebrated ourselves as the most civilized nation on earth—"The West has finally come into its own"—all it amounted to was murder. Industrialized murder. Technologically advanced murder. Murder by the millions. Murder under the regime of Hitler, Pol Pot, Chairman Mao, Stalin. And under the red, white, and blue.

I honor my mother and father. I honor my people. I honor my nation. But our nation has murdered millions. When I look through the keyhole of scripture, in particular the sixth commandment, the word that encapsulates the 20th century is "murder." Millions. As we move into the 21st century, it doesn't seem like anything is improving at all. This summer a movie was published by Hollywood wherein a young man, a quadriplegic, decides to travel to Europe where he can legally commit suicide—murder himself. Legally sanctioned murder. Socially acceptable murder. The movie pictures this as something beautiful, something liberating, and something courageous. If we travel back to the US, ghouls in doctor costumes are legally, socially acceptably allowed to murder the elderly and the disabled if they so choose in the states of Washington, Oregon, Vermont, and coming to a state near you.

When my grandfather was my age, Europe said "no" to the state, to the tyrants, to Hitler, to Mussolini: "We will not put people to sleep! We will not murder the disabled! We will not murder the elderly! We say no to euthanasia!" How many years has it gone? 40, 50, 60? 70 years. And now

they do so legally and in socially acceptable, cool, liberating, and courageous ways. The whole state has imbibed the spirit of Hitler. What they said “no” to when my grandfather was my age, they now stand up for as freeing and liberating and courageous! The 21st century is no different. If we had to think of one word to encapsulate the spirit of our age—as I look through the keyhole of scripture and the sixth commandment, the word that comes to mind is “murder.” Industrialized murder. Technologically advanced murder. Socially acceptable and glamorized and exploited murder.

A statistic I read this week from Al Mohler, the president of Southern Seminary, said that by the time a child is 18 years old in the US, they have witnessed 80-100,000 murders—on television and in video games. Stylized, glorified, aesthetically pleasing murders. Vicariously they murder with their thumbs on a daily basis. It’s big money. It’s exploited. It’s sung about. It’s glamorized. It’s celebrated. Children are stomping each other’s heads into the ground. They’re knocking out grandmas. They’re murdering one another.

If you go online to an abortion mill’s website, you can click on a dropdown menu and scroll through the available body parts. Videos prove it to be true. Everyone sees it and nothing is done about it. It’s white collar. It’s sanitized. It’s linoleum floor execution. If we had to think of a word that encapsulates what our country is becoming to stand for and what it does stand for now, I’ll be honest with you, generally speaking—as I look through the keyhole of the sixth commandment, it’s murder.

I don’t say this pointing any fingers. I say this lamenting. I love my country. As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, this week I wept over my people. I harbor no ill will, no agenda, and no animosity, but the facts are clear. Toby Keith sang: “Justice will be served, and you’ll be sorry you messed with the US of A.” That song scares the death out of me. Because justice will be served, but not by the US of A. We’ll be the ones receiving it. “And the eagle will fly

and there's gonna be hell to pay." There will be hell to pay, but we won't be dishing it out. We are already receiving it.

What is done—what is the response to this culture of death, where murder is so easy and so “cool” and so profitable? What is the response? Fastings, prayer services, vigils, protests, mourning? Crying out for justice, for mercy, for life, for flourishing, for prosperity—for freedom? Who is everybody crying to? Who are they praying to? I speak generally, as a citizen of this nation, as a fellow human being: Who's everybody praying to?

In ancient Israel, whenever there was an injustice—when the people of God were exploited—when enemies attacked—when death reigned—the people of Israel mourned; they took to the streets. They protested. They held fasts. They held vigils. But most of the time they turned to false gods. They turned and put their confidence in their political alliances—if you know your Old Testament, think with me—we're trying to look through the scriptures to see what's going on in this world. They turned to Egypt, Assyria, the powers that be. They said: “If only we had a king! If only we had a king! God, give us a king! If only we had a king like all the other nations, and then we would be able to experience justice and peace, and no longer would we be exploited—if only we had a king!” And God said, “No king will ever bring that to you.”

But there were times when the nation of Israel took their confidence out of earthly saviors and they removed their confidence and their hopes and dreams from the saviors and the false prophets and the false promisers of this world, and they put it in God. Under the rule of Josiah, they began to remodel the temple. And you know what they discovered in the dust and the ashes and the decay of the temple? They discovered something—it was very interesting—do you know what they had found? It had been lost for ages. A Bible! It didn't mean that they hadn't been fasting. All along they had been fasting and performing their rituals and doing their sacrifices and going to church and vigils and prayer services, etc., but they didn't have the

Bible! They discover the Bible and they begin to see “Oh, God has promises for us! He offers salvation, he offers redemption, but he does so through certain means and avenues like ‘Thou shalt not murder’ and ‘Thou shalt not have any other gods before me.’” And the nation experienced revival under Josiah.

In Egypt, after 400 years of slavery, they finally cried out to the true God, “It’s too much!” And he heard them and redeemed them. Why do you think it took him 400 years? Is God a procrastinator? Is he slow in fulfilling his promises? Does he wash his hands of our brokenness and our pain? It took 400 years because for 400 years they were praying to the gods of Egypt. And as soon as things got tough in the wilderness, they took it right back up again.

Who do we pray to? Who do we trust? Who are we crying out to for justice? Who are the signs meant for? Who are the candles lit to? It’s not God. It’s not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God who sent his only begotten son to live the life that we should live and to shed his blood for our bloody hands—not that God. We don’t want that God. And we don’t want his justice. Because when his justice rolls down, we’re all in trouble. And we don’t want his whole truth—it’s to other gods. They don’t have little names that make it obvious, but the evangelical church (Let me apply it. If I don’t apply it, then what good is it, honestly?)— “If we only had the right judge, then the murders and the abortions could quit.” We’ve been saying that since the 1970s. Has anything improved? No. “If we only had the right president, then hope and change would reign.” We’ve been saying that for 200 years. “If we only had the right sheriff, if we only had the right governor, if we only had the right policies”—no! If we only had the right God.

I’m not saying that some aren’t worse than others. I’m not saying that policies don’t matter and that things can’t get better. But if all of your strategies and all of your building and all of your efforts are built on shifting sands, they will only last for so long. Unless we get not our political

problems solved, and not necessarily even our cultural problems solved, but our religious problems solved, none of our efforts will amount to anything but more and more death. We cry out for life but we reject the author of life. We cry out for salvation, but we reject the various means that God uses to bring salvation—his law, his teachings, his gospel, his word, his son, and the blood of his son. How can we say, “Give us a brighter day!” when we have blotted out the son with our sins?

My only conclusion is that we are not lighting candles to the true God. We are not writing signs to the true God, and when you do a deal with demons, you can't expect anything other than death. When you bow the knee to devils, to false gods, they don't have eyes to see you, they don't have ears to hear you, they don't have hands to save you. As I look through the keyhole of scripture to our nation, and I try to think of one word that encapsulates the problem, it's “idolatry.” We want to taste the fruit while chopping at the root. We want to experience the flourishing that comes when a society embraces the sixth commandment, “Thou shalt not murder.” We want to taste the fruit of flourishing and prosperity that comes when a society celebrates life, but we have rejected the first commandment. And as you reject the first, you cannot then therefore expect to receive the benefits of the sixth, or the fifth, or the seventh, or any of them.

So what about us? So far I've identified with my nation, but if I step over and I identify with my real nation, with the family of God, the church that belongs to Christ—the body of Christ—and I ask this: “What do we do about it? How do we respond?” I come to a few biblical conclusions:

- 1) We respond to a culture of death by crying out to the true God. This does not go without saying. You think that that's just a throwaway line, but it's not, because I strongly believe that the church is in bed with false gods. Not completely, not wholly—there is a remnant—but we in America have taken our Christianity and blended it with the

spirit of this age. We must do all that we possibly can to cry out to the true God—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God that we name, and has told us his name, Jesus Christ. Those who bow the knee to Nebuchadnezzar must pray to Nebuchadnezzar. Those who wear his mark proudly must pray to him. Those who put their confidence and their hope in him must pray to him.

But we put our confidence and our hope in the true, living, real God. And that is to whom we pray. And as we cry out, we dare not point any fingers. One thing that the videos from this week have shown me—and they've shown me a lot—and of course there's a lot that they don't show—but one thing I think is clear: that there is no room for anybody to be on any high horse. God has spread humility across this land—humiliation, in fact. And if it's not enough to convince you, based on what has happened this week, that you have no room to judge and to condemn, then consider when Jesus Christ came into this world, we who were murdering each other took a little time out—took a little ceasefire—came together, and murdered him. And what that means is: “How dare we point a red right finger at the blood on other people's hands?” “For there is none righteousness; no, not one. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

We can convict, we can rebuke, we can exhort, but we cannot condemn. We can preach the truth, but we never preach the truth from a high horse. We never preach the truth up on top of a mountain that we think we stand on. We never preach the truth as though we have attained. We never look down on others. We are humbled by the doctrine of total depravity. We are humbled by our universal condemnation in Adam. We are humbled by the fact that when we look through the Bible at our own hands, what we see is blood. And that always lowers the fingers, and consequently, it lowers the fist. Should we be like the thief on the right pointing out the sins of the thief on the left? Should we be like the thief on the left pointing out the sins of the thief on the right? That's now how you enter into the

kingdom of heaven. Should we be like the guard at Auschwitz pointing out the sins of the guard at Dachau? Should we be crunching the numbers to see who is the worst sinner?

No, when you see through the keyhole of scripture at your own hands, you see blood. And it lowers them. So as we cry out to the true God, we dare not cry out in any spirit of condemnation—in the spirit of conviction, exhortation, truth, boldness, but also a spirit of humility. We dare not take the truth like a two-by-four and wield it against other people, as though this feels good in our hands. We are not to use the truth to bludgeon and to batter and to rationalize and to justify. We must embrace, as the people of God, the whole truth, which none of us can wield or use as a weapon against one another, lest it be turned on us. As we cry out to the true God, we dare not cry out in spirit of condemnation but humility.

What we should cry out in is a spirit of confession. Not condemnation, but confession. Abraham cried out to God on behalf of the city of Sodom: “If there be one righteous man, would you spare the city?” Moses cried out, “God, if you don’t go with us, it’s not even worth us going!” He cried out on behalf of the children of Israel just as God was about to smite them. Jesus wept over Jerusalem. Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

Jesus was numbered with the transgressors, and we as a nation of priests must identify ourselves with our nation, with our people, and take them like priests to the throne room of God, lifting them up in prayer that does not condemn but confesses. Like Daniel—Daniel is one of the very few characters in the Bible who nothing bad is ever said about. Read about Noah: It’s clear he was a terrible sinner. Read about Abraham: He sent Hagar out into the wilderness to die—a murderer, redeemed. Read about Moses: He murdered a man. We come from a long line of murderers redeemed by the blood of the lamb. But Daniel—of course he was a sinner, too, but the Bible never says anything about his sin—prayed this, as a representative, as a priest of his own nation: “We have not listened to your servants,



the prophets. We who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land—we have not listened to your servants, the prophets. We, the people of God, confess our guilt.”

If we as Christians, as a nation of priests, would bring our nation up to God in confession, what would we confess? I have a list. I’m going to pray this list, and you can follow my lead as you believe you should: “Father, we confess for our wholesale abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, genetic research, bogus wars, governmental oppression, lawless streets, glorified murder in music and movies that we buy, cowardly judges and cowardly leaders that wash their hands like Pilate, cultural envy and hate, not to mention all of the ways that we have murdered souls through lies, false teaching, and wickedness, both individually and institutionally.”

- 2) But we don’t stop there. We respond to the culture of death by preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. For Christians, we know that confession is followed by the absolution of our sins because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Our confession leads into thanksgiving, for though we had blood on our hands, his blood washes us as white as snow. And though we are guilty of murder, he was murdered so that we do not have to be executed. So we mourn, but not without joy. We are filled with gravity and sobriety, but not without a glimmer of gladness because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. For our nation, we bring them in confession to the throne room of God—as priests and as prophets, we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. He is the only one who can heal our land. He is the only one who can fix the brokenness. He is the only king and savior and leader who can bring about salvation.
- 3) But then, I gotta be honest with you: praying for our nation and preaching to our nation the gospel of Jesus Christ isn’t enough, if we cannot embody that gospel—if we cannot show them a new way of flourishing—if we can’t walk on the path of flourishing which is the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ—if we can’t show them a new

way—if we can't embody that gospel—if we can't in our own midst experience the flourishing that comes from meditation and delighting in the law of God.

And so as we confess our sins and as we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, we are also filled with a new commitment to obey God and to walk in his ways and to seek his counsel and to stop crying out for the kings of this earth but to cry out to the king of this universe, who says, "Thou shalt not murder." That means we say to our culture, in the name of Jesus Christ: "If you want to experience life, if you want to experience flourishing, here it is, the way of life: Trust the doctor. Take the prescription. Trust God so much that you build your life around him and you follow his rules. And if you want to experience flourishing in society, you have to consider the sixth commandment, built upon the first, and that means that you have to say 'no' to murder, 'no' to homicide, to suicide, to murder in cold blood, in red blood. 'No' to murder with the hand, the mind, the heart and through plots and cowardice. 'No' to the attitudes of murder: Envy, bitterness—the harboring of a secret ill will toward your brother and sister in Christ—covetousness, arrogance, pride."

Who here has these things in their heart? We—it is not enough to confess for them as priests or to proclaim the gospel to them as prophets—we must walk in a new way of life. We must embody the words that we preach through saying "no" to murder and saying "yes" to the protection and the sustaining and the celebration of all life—preborn, born, young, old, white, black, elderly, disabled, healthy, enemies, friends, homosexuals, perverts, murderers—*all* life is created in the image of God.

We say "no" to murder. We say "yes" to life's sustenance and protection and provision—we celebrate it. And we use our pens and our pulpits and our mouths and our power and our social leverage and our names and our reputations to do so. And we use our parenting to instill in our children that everyone is created in the image of God. "Little kid, you are *not* a sophisticated ape. You are a

human created in the image of God and there is an innate dignity in you, no matter what the world calls you—whether they call you a savage, whether they call you property, whether they call you a zygote or a fetus or thug or an addict—you are a human, you are a child of God, created in his image, and we celebrate your life.”

We preach it, we believe it, and we live it. Over time, I do believe what will happen is that our nation will continue to reject God, the first commandment, and as a result continue to reject all the other commandments, and the path of flourishing will go farther and farther down. There’s already a downward trajectory—a trajectory towards wickedness and murder. The book of Proverbs says that a society always has a slant to it, and when a society is slanted toward death, it’s the poor and the powerless and the marginalized and the voiceless that quickly and easily slide right off into death. And it’s not getting any better, folks. As far as I can see—I’m not a prophet—unless there is a revival, unless there is repentance of our idolatry, it’s only going to get worse.

And as the church celebrates life, we will become more and more and more marginalized, exploited, confusing, misunderstood, and eventually murdered. Now what does Jesus Christ call us to in that? To be a counter culture. To be a light in the darkness. To be a place of life in a valley of death. What this means for Christ Church specifically is that as our society slopes away from God and toward murder, and as the poor and the powerless continue to slip off into death, and as the church celebrates life and proclaims the gospel of Jesus Christ and stands confessing to God our nation, we will become more and more and more unique.

Jesus is cleansing his church. The days of church shopping—looking for a “dynamic and vital youth ministry”—that’s over. It’s gone. Coming to church wanting to find a cool, hip church where all the sermons are modified according to the poll numbers and they’re polished and they’re prompter-esque talks where I feel good and I get a little pat on my shoulder and the corners are rounded—those days are vanishing. Jesus is flipping tables! Nobody gets to be politely and quietly and peacefully saying, “We

love Jesus, and everything's gonna be great"—no, it's coming at you! It's coming at us. It's not going to be long. I'm not a prophet—I've read the Bible, and as I look through the Bible, it is clear to me that a hardening is coming over this nation.

We have rationalized murder by dehumanizing other people. Oh, we've rationalized it. "They're not humans. They're property. They're savages. They're zygotes." But I see something, I believe, through the scriptures, that is happening where people are willfully saying, "No, that is a child. DNA confirms it and it is a person, but I'm bigger, I'm stronger, and I have the weapons." There's a hardening that's coming on over this nation, and unless there's a great revival and a great reformation, the days of this American, consumeristic, namby-pamby Christianity are over. You wanna find a church where it's conveniently located to your house and you don't have to drive too far, and you can kind of slip in and be anonymous and sit right in there and no one's gonna confront the fact that you're wearing the mark proudly and that you're bowing the knee to Nebuchadnezzar proudly, and you're serving, every day of your life, money and sex and your career and the market and the bottom line? Jesus is flipping tables in this nation. I hope you see it. I don't say this to point the finger at all.

I wrote this down as a prayer for us:

May we become...

-A people who refuse to give their allegiance, who refuse to give their names and to pull levers and to push buttons for politicians who are pro-life, who aren't proactively for life. It's not enough to say it. What we want is for our leaders is to lay their bodies and to lay their lives and to lay their names and their reputations down for life. Not just jump on our platform.

-A people who don't say "Hey, have my name, have my lever-pulling, have my button-pushing, have my vote because you say you're pro-life." No, we need people who are proactively for life. John Calvin taught the doctrine of the lesser magistrate. What he believed is that

when your state and your government has become murderously corrupt, it is time for Christians to call upon their local officials—their local sheriffs, their local governors, their local politicians—and demand they say “no” to Caesar. “Render that which is Caesar’s to Caesar.” But what do you do, Christian, when Caesar demands worship? What do you do when Caesar demands blood? Not revolution. Jesus was not a revolutionary. But he was a radical. And he subverted and took the legs out from underneath the corruption and the murderous system of his day. May we do the same. You don’t get our support just because you jump on a bandwagon. We demand that you stand up pro-actively for life.

-A people who lend their voice to the voiceless found in the wombs of mothers, and a people who lend their voice to the voiceless in the dark solitary confident cells of our state-run prison systems.

-A people who cannot be co-opted by the state. A people who cannot be bribed and silenced by money and handouts and grants.

-A people who love babies and have lots of them by God’s grace and by God’s blessing and show the world by their actions and their families that children are a blessing, not a drain on your self-actualization.

-A people who opens up their arms to the babies abandoned by the system in foster care and adoption, national and international, and who do so with an ever-so graceful, humble winsomeness that inspires rather than condemns onlookers.

-A people who love when hated, speak kindly when reviled, smile when disrespected—a peace-making people: warm, de-escalating, godly, holy.

-A people who don’t dehumanize and don’t call people property and savages and thugs and bums, but men and women created in the image of God.

-A people who embodies their belief in the dignity of all men by building an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse church that is a testimony to the world. If you don’t see the relevance and the non-negotiable

nature of building an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse church now, I suppose you never will.

-A people willing to strive for unity in the bond of peace rather than run off every time it gets touchy and tough.

-A people humbled by the fact that we by our sins killed the author of life, but emboldened by the fact that he turned our murder into our salvation.

-A people filled with sorrow—but our sorrow is not without joy, for our sins have been forgiven, our murders cleansed—saved sinners, redeemed murderers.

We are not the world. We are not a party of this world. We do not line up with their platforms and their agendas. We are the church, the body of Christ, and I believe as we preach him and confess our sins and embody his teachings in our own lives, he will draw men to us.