

*7The Lord said to Moses, "Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; 8they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!< 9The Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. 10Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation." 11But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, "O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. 13Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, 'I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'"
14And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.*

Thou shalt not kill. The 5th Commandment. It was on a Saturday morning. I was in sixth grade. A confirmation student. My pastor told about a moment in his life that I will always remember.

His wife and his newborn son were just home from the hospital. He was sleeping upstairs in their bed, she was sleeping in the living room with her child. My pastor was awakened by the sound of breaking glass. He said, "I went down those stairs ready to kill that intruder." The would-be robber slipped away when he heard footsteps coming. There was no killing that night.

What a story for a pastor to tell sixth and seventh graders. You shall not kill. But sometimes there are exceptions.

The almighty God was ready for an exception that day. The people whom he had brought out of slavery were dancing around an idol, bowing down, worshipping a god of their own creating. The Lord said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf and have worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt”. The Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them and of you I will make a great nation.

I think we all know something about wrath burning hot. To see what we have seen and to hear what we have heard makes us all want to rush down those stairs and slaughter those who have done such a thing. Time and again my mind has called for the annihilation of every one who planned this evil. I hear of people arrested; my heart says, “Torture them, give them the same pain they have caused.” Consume them with our wrath.

But Moses implored the Lord his God and said, “O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Turn from your fierce wrath; Change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self to give them the land and to make of them a great nation. And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

The Lord wanted to let anger have its way, God’s own anger. But Moses reminded God who God was.

My anger is real in these days. My desire to hurt is real.

You and I will not be making the decisions about how America will respond. We all sense that there will be killing. Possibly war. Whatever happens we are intending to support our governments response.

But each day and hour you and I make decisions how we will speak of our enemies. Will my words and your words be words of anger, of revenge, of rage? That is what my heart tells me my words should be. I want to destroy everyone who could hurt the ones I love. I want to make those terrorists and those who support them pay

for what they have done. I imagine them devastated by an atomic blast – crumbled as those towers that came crashing down.

Follow your heart, trust your feelings, that is some of the wisdom of this time in which we live. That would certainly be good advice if my heart was pure, my feelings holy. But always there is a battle going on – not just between terrorists and America – not just between life and death, good and evil out in the world – but always there is a battle going on in you and in me – in your heart and in mine. Will faith in God rule over your thoughts and words and actions or will fear rule in you? Will love be at the very root of what you do and say or will anger and rage and hatred have their way? Will your ultimate trust be in weapons and steel and death or will your ultimate trust be in God, and love and life?

The Lord wanted to destroy God's own people. But Moses reminded the Lord.

Remember that they are your people.

Think of how it will look to the Egyptians – your taking this people out of slavery only to destroy them.

Think of how it will fit with your promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And the Lord changed his mind.

And you and I, of what do we need to be reminded?

That we follow the one who taught, Bless your enemies, pray for those who persecute you?

That Jesus extended the love and concern of God even to tax collectors and sinners?

That our Lord spoke forgiveness even as they were about to put him on the cross?

Moses reminded God. If God needed reminding how much more you and I! I think God has called us together in the church to do this reminding. You tell me about Jesus and I tell you. You remind me that falling towers are not the last word, nor missiles nor marching soldiers. Jesus raised from the dead is the final word. Towers may fall never to be raised but those who belong to Jesus will be raised to life eternal.

Until that day pray that we remember whose we are. You belong to Jesus who loved you more than his own life. Remember that in all you do and say.