

32963 Faith Column, February 8th, 2011
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Community Church of Vero Beach

Keeping the Commandments

We've always been fans of Emily Dickinson. One of her best lines, we think, was a wry comment she once made about keeping the commandments. She said the only one of them she had kept gladly was "consider the lilies!"

Now "consider the lilies" doesn't usually rank among the best known and most honored of the commandments. It's not among the famous ten. But it *is* a Biblical commandment. And to our minds, and Emily's, it's a very good one! We could learn much about God's lavish provision for all creation by considering the beautiful lilies.

So what do you know about the commandments? Many of us have memorized the ten given by Moses at Mt. Sinai, and they have been foundational for our moral and spiritual lives. But there are actually more commandments than those in our Bibles, as Emily Dickinson noted. In fact, rabbinic tradition holds that there are actually 613 commandments given in scripture. These commandments may be grouped into such categories as honoring of God and the Torah, regulating activities of the temple and its priests, maintaining ritual purity, keeping festival days, family life, legal matters, and living in community.

It is that final classification of commandments, about living in community, that captured our imagination recently. Rules that could effectively and productively govern our communal lives seem especially needed in these divisive, troubled times, don't they? What commandments would you like to see widely applied, so that our shared lives might be faithful, peaceful, harmonious, respectful, and loving?

Several years ago Rev. Donald Charles Lacy came up with ten commandments for communal living that just might be a starting place for us today. Here are his ten: 1) Remember each day that Jesus called his followers to be one. 2) Praise God regularly for the wide variety of ways we humans have found to express our faithfulness. 3) Willingly learn from others about their paths of faith. 4) Pray often for those with whom you agree and for those with whom you disagree. 5) Intentionally converse with others about matters of faith - without demanding their adherence to your perspectives. 6) Meditate with enthusiasm about what your specific role in God's great enterprise may be. 7) Acknowledge your debt to those of other faiths for what their heritage has to teach you. 8) Actively seek ways to bring about mutual understanding and appreciation. 9) Consider daily the tragedy that God's children are divided in his name. 10) Consecrate your whole being to the cause of repairing the rents in the fabric of our human communities.

Do you think we could keep those commandments? We imagine that if we did, our communities would look different, and our very lives would, too. Perhaps if we were able to live in peace and harmony with our brothers and sisters, we'd have more time for other vital pursuits and other significant commandments, such as: "consider the lilies."