

“What does your pastor fear?” Exodus 19:2-8a

They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai, and they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain, while Moses went up to God. The LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” So, Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Would you like to know what I am afraid of? Would you like to know what really scares me? I mean ... a lot. Lies... falsehood... fabrication... misinformation... untruth... propaganda... Why do I fear these things?

They are like a corrupt map. You cannot find your way if the map is corrupt. When you are told to go this direction, while your destination is the opposite direction. When you are told that some choices and activities will lead to your flourishing, when, in fact, they do the very opposite and destroy you. When the evil is called good and the wrong is called right. When those who try to stand for the true and good and right are being condemned and silenced.

But when there is no more truth, then there are no more clear criteria for right and wrong. How could they be? Then it is all subjective. Matter of your perspective. And when there are no more right or wrong, there can't be justice and order. How would you even recognize them? But then – how do we organize our lives?

The answer is simple. Those who have the most power to influence the society impose on others what they want to count as true and right and good and just. And they gain their power by appealing to the best of virtues – “we stand for love, and justice, and equality and freedom”. We have heard a lot of this lately.

And who would dare to stand against such noble goals?! Anyone objecting to these new rules is labelled as lying and unloving, evil and unjust, as the enemy of the new world. There is no place for such people in society. Do you think this sounds like a speculation or paranoia? Think again!

I grew up in that country where all this was lived out to its logical conclusions. Those in power determined what was true and good and just, and anyone who disagreed and called out their lies was declared to be the enemy of the state, often punished and often terminated. Millions lost their lives.

Don't let to be deceived! Don't choose to be deceive! Don't trust everything that smiling people on shiny screens tell you. The same dynamics is at work in our country. The move away from the truth towards more and more oppressive and silencing control. Examples of this trend multiply...

This is why I am scared of lies and falsehood, and perhaps even more from the fact that so many are indifferent, they don't care about the truth and don't worry about the lies. Those are not some innocent mistakes. Those are not just different views.

Lies are like a sickness. Like an infectious disease. They spread and parasitize, they take over healthy body and society, they weaken it and eventually destroy it. There are so many good things in our society, but many of them are being deliberately eroded and replaced with their opposites.

Let's use the Ten Commandments to see how twisted the many false ideologies that plague our society are. Just a few examples. 1st to 3rd Commandments. There is this growing rebellion against the true God, be it because of the theory of evolutions, or because of science worship.

"There is no God" or at least "all religions are equal and ... equally useless". It is not some enlightened or progressive view; it is the very opposite – self-righteous arrogance. If we believe such lies, they rob us of our humanity. How?

They take away our significance and dignity, they leave us without meaning and purpose, without criteria for good and evil. If someone thinks that all religions are equal, let them travel to Islamic countries, to Hindu countries, to animist countries and see the fruits of these belief systems for themselves. Reality doesn't lie.

4th Commandment. We see this anti-authority sentiment. No respect for parents, teachers, people in positions of responsibility, pastors, government officials, police... and we gradually lose the harmonious order in our relationships and in our society. The level of chaos raises and it threatens to drown us.

5th Commandment. Disdain for human life. Sometimes it seems that no life matters. Only our choices... Unborn lives don't matter. Elderly lives don't matter. "Let us kill them with dignity." Lives in non-Western countries don't matter, even if lost in deadly violence or poverty. And it seems that lives of those who disagree with whatever the latest trend of social justice is... they probably don't matter too.

6th Commandment. Sexual freedom, or promiscuity. Our bodies and what we do with them don't matter, faithfulness doesn't matter, chastity doesn't matter. But the satisfaction of every imaginable sexual desire, whatever harmful it may be to self or others – that seems to matter the most, that has become a supreme right.

7th Commandment. Greed and consumerism. Building bigger and bigger barns where there is never enough, believing that more stuff equals more happiness. This kind of thinking takes away our love for our neighbours, makes us selfish, it robs us of the joy of giving and serving others with our generosity.

8th Commandment. Denial of the truth, of the very existence of truth. Which means that we can use our words to achieve our goals. It doesn't matter if we lie, or twist the facts, or arrange them in a deceptive way. As long as they lead to our goals. In the Church this often manifests as the despising of sound Biblical teaching in favour of "let's just be nice".

9th and 10th Commandments. Coveting and craving. Training our appetites to be never satisfied, to be never content. Such attitudes bear their bitter fruits. We are not grateful, and we are not joyful. We don't know anymore what it means.

And by the way, I am not talking about those others who don't belong to the Christian Church. Much of the above mentioned apply to us. Too often we are a part of the problem... Too often we are deceived with slogans for love and justice, etc. Too often we want to please people more than to be faithful to our God.

Too often we are fearful and lack courage to speak the truth and to stand for the truth, and sometimes we are too ignorant. We fail to live out our true identity. I know it is true for me. Sure, we live in uncertain times. Some days it seems that the order that we have enjoyed for years and years is collapsing.

It may as well be true. But our today's reading offers some great encouragement and brings great comfort to every Christian, and to your pastor as well. Two things that I would like to highlight – the transitory nature of every human made empire or state, and the permanent nature of God's eternal Kingdom.

You see, our Christian identity is not tied to any particular earthly Kingdom. Surely, we tend to attach our hearts to the country where we live, we want it to do well, and then we worry about what is going to happen.

On the one hand, that is understandable. That's where we live, and we need to care for our country. But remember this, as we read our God confirming: "All the earth is mine," and so also our main identity is rooted not in this world, but in the Kingdom of Christ, as is our future and our security.

This is how Isaiah describes our God: "Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; [...] All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness." (Is 40:15, 17)

Our God holds the entire history in His hand, and He guides it towards His end, and no one can hinder Him, whatever they do, whether they lie or deceive or destroy. He uses even His enemies to do His bidding.

All the Kingdoms of man serve His purposes, and He uses them as He pleases to promote the one Kingdom that will remain forever – the Kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ, the Kingdom where your true citizenship lays.

Egypt was the greatest empire of that day, and our God used them to make His name known to all the surrounding nations. Assyria was the greatest empire at her time, our God used them to bring many to repentance.

Babylon was the greatest empire of her time, and God used them to glorify His name. Persia was the greatest empire of her time and God used them to make His name known in its most distant quarters.

Macedonia was the greatest empire in her time and our God used them to prepare the way for the Gospel. Rome was the greatest empire of her time and our God used them to spread the Good News to the ends of the earth.

Besides He foretold all of this through His servants – prophets, and fulfilled the prophecies as promised. The Triune God makes every nation and every empire to serve His ultimate purpose – ushering in the Kingdom that will last forever.

The same is true today. And you, my dear brothers and sisters, are the treasured possession of this God, the citizens of this Kingdom and His royal priests. What was said about the Israel at the Mount Sinai, now applies to Christians.

What does this mean for us? More great news, that's what it means. Israelites didn't choose Yahweh to be their God. He chose them. He freed them from their slavery and He carried them as on eagles' wings. That is a beautiful picture.

When it's time for baby eagles to learn how to fly their parents push them out of their nests ... just do it! But then the Mama-eagle or Dad-eagle spread their wings and soar under them keeping them safe and allowing them to learn.

Similarly, you are chosen by God, freed from your bondage to sin and death and devil and you are been carried as on eagles' wings. You are God the Father's treasured possession. Not because we are such treasures. Don't flatter yourself.

No, but when you purchase something, you pay the price. The higher the price, the more valuable the possession. Our God has chosen to pay the ultimate price for you – His life. This is why He see you as His treasured possession.

There is nothing more valuable for Him than we, His little, funny and ungrateful creatures. This is why He has made us His royal priesthood and His holy nation. What does that mean? This is where our true privileges are revealed.

As God's chosen people you have this great privilege that you can have access to the Triune God. He invites you to come into His presence, to share in His holiness, to receive His most valuable gifts – the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of all our sins, and the Holy Sacrament, and to bring our prayer and intercessions directly to Him.

Only we can do it. But then we also have access to the privileged knowledge, wisdom and truth that the Triune God reveals to His chosen people. You see, these privileges shape both dimensions of our lives. Our relationship with the true God and our relationships with one another and His entire creation.

Therefore, listen to your God and live accordingly, “for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who [...] will say, “Surely [these are] a wise and understanding people.” For who else has a god so near to them as God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is to us, whenever we call upon him? And who else has such wisdom as given to us in the Ten Commandments?” (See Deut. 4:6-8).

And not only that – once you know who you are, and under whose protection you live, and who carries you of His wings, once the Holy Spirit convinces you of your true identity, and fills you with joy about your future hope, what is there left to worry?

What is there left to fear?!

Amen.