

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
October 31, 2010**

“The Ten Commandments” series

Exodus 20:16

“Jump Off The Bandwagon”

Hymns: 580 – 200

Distribution: 306 - 459

Closing: 329

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

Exodus:20:16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

Do you know what the most popular vehicle in America is? You see a lot of these (Hyundai Sonata). You see a ton of these (Honda Accord). You see quite a few of these (Minivans and F-150s). But you’ve yet to see the most popular vehicle. Do you have a guess? Let’s have a look: (Show bandwagon). You ever rode on one of these? People love them. People jump on bandwagons when it comes to sports teams, politicians, stocks, even little things like answers in school, the list could go on and on. Why do people love the bandwagon? Probably because the risk is low. The bandwagon is easy because it is what everyone else is doing. You don’t have to worry about humiliation. If you are wrong then so is everyone else. You don’t have to defend yourself, because no one is questioning why you personally picked this thing. The bandwagon appeals to people because it allows them to do what they often like to do best: blend in with everyone else.

Contrast that with the opposite: cheering for the team that always loses, picking the stock that no one else is going near, advocating the politician that no one else likes, choosing disagree when everyone else raises their hand to agree. It is a harder position to take because you are alone. You are leaving yourself open to ridicule. You will probably be called to defend your position more regularly. There is no hiding behind others.

With those two ideas before us, we turn to our story this morning, and in it we focus our eyes on a

familiar place. We are going to the place of the cross, we are going to Calvary. However, our eyes are not focused solely on the cross in the center, this morning we are looking at the two men who hang on the left and the right.

As we look at the scene, we see people clamoring to jump on the most popular of bandwagons. Luke tells us what it was, **“The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.’ The soldiers also came up and mocked him.”** Mark, in his gospel, adds, **“Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads.”** This ever-popular bandwagon was slander and gossip. When Jesus was hanging on the cross, it was easy for people to start the mocking. He looked like the loser. He didn’t look like the one whose side you would want to be on. He was easy to kick because it looked like he was down.

Evidently, the men hanging to Jesus’ left and right felt the same way; two of the other gospels – Matthew and Mark – tell us that both of the criminals hanging with Jesus joined in with the crowd while they mocked. They jumped on the bandwagon. This bandwagon was an easy way to escape some of the shame that they were going through. Those men knew exactly why they were on that cross. They were hardened criminals; men who spent their lives taking advantage of others. Now, as they hung on those crosses, everyone knew it. There was no way to escape as people looked at them and scoffed; unless no one looked at them. If they could help to turn people’s eyes to someone else, their shame would be lessened. So they joined in the jeering, **“Aren’t you the Christ? Save yourself and us!”** If they could help the people to focus on Jesus, it took the attention away from them. Though they were hanging on crosses for all to see, this gave them an opportunity to be part of the crowd, it allowed them to fade from center of the picture.

It might seem senseless for those criminals to mock and slander someone who was in the same position as they were, but is it something that is that uncommon? How often don’t we jump on this bandwagon of gossip and slander, speaking poorly of others? When the group of friends starts ripping on someone, there we are, joining in with a few slanderous barbs of our own. When the coworkers start tearing apart the guy who just wrecked a project or dropped a big sale, there we are, voicing our disbelief that this guy could be so incompetent. When classmates start a rumor, there we are, ready to pass it on to others. The list could again go on and on, times when we gladly

mock someone or tear them down. There isn't a single one of us who thinks that it is right. There isn't a single one of us who would want to be gossiped about or spoken poorly of in the same way that we too often speak of others. Yet, so often when the opportunity presents itself, there we are, ready to jump on that bandwagon of gossip.

If we know that it is wrong, why do we so often do it? Like we said, it is a comfortable place. It's a lot easier to be part of the crowd. As long as someone else is the object of gossip or ridicule, we quickly realize that it can't be us. And for wretched sinners who know the depths of our sinful thoughts and actions, keeping our own shortcomings out of the spotlight is a constant goal. We are often willing to go to great lengths to make sure that the things that we know about ourselves don't become common knowledge. Public embarrassment or shame is one of the worst feelings there is. One of the easiest ways to avoid it is to point the finger at others just like those two criminals on the cross. And because of that, we spend an awful lot of time with our fingers out, tearing others down with our words, spreading gossip with our tongues, starting fires that can't help but capture people's attention, as we hide our shameful things over here.

But as much as we try to hide what we are from others, we cannot hide what we are from ourselves and we cannot hide what we are from God. And as those two criminals hung on their own crosses, attempting to hide their shame by mocking another, one of the men was brought to that realization. Though he was on the same bandwagon as everyone else, he didn't feel very good about it. Destroying another with his words wasn't helping him in his situation at all. He was still on that cross, facing death, facing the wages of his sinful life. With that realization, he fell silent as his counterpart continued to mock. He fell silent and watched what was going on. He fell silent and thought about his sinful life. He fell silent and looked to God.

And there on the cross, he now saw a Savior. He saw God's Son, a perfect man who was willingly and humbly suffering an unjust death. He saw a man who heard insults and responded by asking his Father to forgive those who cursed him. He saw a man in his worst moments of pain who took the time to smile at his mother and make sure she was cared for. He saw the Son of God who could take away the shame that this lifelong criminal felt as he spent his last few moments on the cross. He saw the Son of God who could give him comfort in the midst of earthly pain. He saw God who could give him eternal paradise.

With that faith, he jumped off the bandwagon and broke his silence. With his words, he would no longer be part of the crowd. With his words, he would stand out as different. And that was fine. When the other criminal mocked Jesus once again, this man had a different response. He rebuked his fellow criminal, **“Don't you fear God,' he said, 'since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”** It would have been easy to keep his mouth shut. It would have been easy to stay silent while others continued the mocking. However, the man could not keep silent. He had become convinced of what he had seen and heard, and just as the apostles would later declare, he had to speak. He defended Christ even when it would lead to ridicule and shame. He boldly defended Jesus' name and reputation when he could have stayed silent.

As we observe Reformation today, think also of another man who jumped off the bandwagon and stood up and spoke out. Martin Luther could have stayed silent. He could have kept what he learned from the Bible to himself. But he did not. He spoke out and defended Jesus' name. He faced the opposition. He took a position that would be opposed.

Is that something that we would be willing to do? Would we speak up and out if we had that opportunity to defend our Savior's name? Would we be willing to put ourselves out there and face rejection and ridicule to stand up for Jesus' reputation? Let me tell you that it is an opportunity that we do, in fact, have every day. It comes every time we are faced with the decision of whether to jump on the bandwagon of gossip and slander or go against it and speak up. It comes every day when we can join in tearing someone down or we can stand alone and defend their name. It comes every day when we can mock someone for messing up or we can stand beside them and say, “You know what, I mess up pretty bad, too.” Those are times when we can raise our voice like the criminal and defend Jesus' name. Though it may not seem like we are helping our Savior directly, Jesus has said, **“Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you do for me.”** Let us remember this as we debate whether to ride on the comfort of the bandwagon or stand and speak. We can look at each person who needs our help as if it were Jesus himself.

Let us also remember Jesus' exchange with the criminal. As the man confessed Jesus as his innocent

Savior, Jesus also confessed this man as his companion in paradise. He assured him that his faith and his confession would be rewarded. Jesus confessed this man as his own. Jesus would remember him when he went into his kingdom. And Jesus has given that same promise to us as well. Let us remember that as we speak well of and defend his children on this earth, we are also helping our Savior. Let us use our tongues to defend our Savior and his people every day. Don't be afraid to stand up and speak out, your Savior loves it when you do. He will tell you when you join him in paradise. Amen.