

Like much of the world during our first lockdown our family discovered Netflix. The entertainment streaming service. It came about with our youngest son, Steve, deciding to buy a very swish TV. Then came the Netflix. It's all about 4k, Dad he said, and he was right. The huge screened multilettered television coupled with the high-speed internet, delivering 4k graphics and sound, cause he's now got a sound bar as well, has taken the television viewing experience to a completely new level.

And one of the things I have been watching on Netflix over the past little while is The Crown. If you've never seen it you have a treat in store. It's, so far, 3 seasons of 10 episodes each about our current Royal Family, beginning with the abdication of Edward VIII. How much of it is fact and how much fiction are anyone's guess but it's absorbing viewing, and one of the recent ones I saw was about the crisis which occurred in the UK during the first Labour government of Harold Wilson. It is suggested that some of Britain's elite got together and planned a coup and the person they wanted to lead that coup was the Queen's cousin, Lord Mountbatten.

There is a scene in the programme where Mountbatten is giving a speech about the need for change, and he closes that speech with a recitation of Rudyard Kipling's poem, The Road to Mandalay. In it he quotes these two lines.

"Ship me some where's east of Suez, where the best is like the worst,  
Where there aren't no Ten Commandments an' a man can raise a thirst;"

It was this use of the ten commandments by Lord Mountbatten that struck a chord with me. Here is a man, a soldier, a former leader of the British armed forces, and cousin to the Queen, a very senior member of the Royal family, suggesting that a place where there were no ten commandments, would be a better place, a freer place, a more liberated place.

And today I think those thoughts are even more widespread. For some reason it seems going to a place where there "aren't no ten commandments" is what people really think a free life is, a liberated life. A place where you can do what you want without anyone else having any say in the matter. It's almost as if the ten commandments are a bondage that need to be shaken off, and once that's done, we'll be free.

Free to make Gods of what we like. Free to say what we want about anything. Free to work all the hours and days in the week and the year. Free to make others do the same. Free to disregard our parents. Free to murder. Free to commit adultery. Free to steal. Free to lie. Free to lust after our neighbours' husband or wife or partner, or any of our neighbour's belongings.

The thing about the freedom of getting away from the ten commandments is that it's really a push to ignore community. It's a freedom from the structures which help us realise that life is more than just ourselves.

Is life better if we make Gods of what we like, if we are free to say whatever we want. Is working all the time, especially if you have too, freedom? Are our communities better off with people disregarding their parents, murdering others, marriages being destroyed by infidelity? People stealing others, the community's property? Is lying freedom? Are our lives enhanced by being envious of our neighbours, do we get peace from wanting the man or woman over the fence?

This idea of freedom for the individual has come into stark relief during the past 6 or 7 months with Covid 19. We have all seen how difficult it is to deal with a pandemic if everyone wants to be free to do their own thing! Community goals and responsibilities are vital for all of us as we struggle to live with this health emergency. It only takes one or two free individuals to make life much more serious for everyone.

For us as Christians this is brought home in the constant calls we hear from the scriptures to “place others interest above our own” ... “to love one another”. These are community minded not individually minded calls.

The ten commandments are community responsibilities and decisions much like our pandemic response, they are for the good of everyone. So, in fact, the freedom Lord Mountbatten espouses is actually the wrong way around. Freedom is not to do, but to don't!

We don't have to make Gods of what we like. We don't have to say what we want about everything. We don't have to work all the hours and days in the week and the year. We don't have to make others do the same. We don't have to disregard our parents. We don't have to murder, commit adultery, steal, lie, lust after our neighbours' husband or wife or partner, or any of our neighbour's belongings.

We are free NOT to do those things. We are free to say NO.

In the beautiful 4k high speed internet multilettered streaming world of Netflix's the Crown, the Queen makes these very points to Lord Mountbatten after he tries to justify his part in the plan to remove the Labour government and then asks the Queen why she is protecting a man like Harold Wilson. She says, I am protecting the Prime Minister. I am protecting the constitution. I am protecting democracy.

She is in effect, saying, I am protecting the community. I am free not to do as you ask. I am free to say NO.

This is real freedom, freedom to act in the best interests of others, not ourselves

This is what the ten commandments are; real freedom for the good of the whole, not just the indulgence of the few.

Thanks be to God.