

Along the Way 23 August 2019
Commandment Number Seven

How old were you when you first heard of the Ten Commandments? I was a young child sitting in a musty church basement Sunday school room when I heard commandment number seven: "Thou shalt not kill." I raised my hand to ask a question. "Does this mean we shouldn't kill anything?" "Yes" the literalist teacher replied. "What about mosquitos?" I asked. "Or chickens, pigs and steers?" I knew very early on where the meat we ate came from. Some had been my pets until I learned it's best not to get too attached to animals on the farm. In exasperation, the teacher shouted, "Okay, this just means people, we shouldn't kill people!"

I raised my hand. The teacher tried to ignore me but there were only four students. "What about bad people?" I asked. "What about wars?" I continued.

I think the teacher was ready to kill me.

A few weeks ago, Attorney General William Barr's decision to reinstate the federal death penalty was disturbing to me. The United States is one of the few countries in the world that still permits the government to kill its own people in the name of justice. America is joined in this regard by China, North Korea, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Recently the United Church of Christ issued this statement: *The United Church of Christ historically and unequivocally opposes the death penalty. Not only is the practice barbaric and immoral, but it is also disproportionately applied to individuals of color. Choosing to whom mercy and compassion should be offered contradicts our belief that each person is a child of God, and all are worthy of humanity and dignity. If the state continues to legalize the killing of human beings, there is no hope of creating a just and humane society.*

"Thou shalt not kill." Even a short commandment is complex. But I can appreciate the Congregational and UCC commitment to living out commandment number seven.

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