



Sermon, November 12, 2017
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series: Tending the Path
“**Additions, Accretions and Occasional Oversights**”

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. ² The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. ⁴ The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. ⁵ (At that time I was standing between the Lord and you to declare to you the words^[a] of the Lord; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

⁶ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ⁷ you shall have no other gods before^[b] me.

⁸ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁹ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, ¹⁰ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation^[c] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

¹¹ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

¹² Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the Lord your God commanded you. ¹³ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁴ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. ¹⁵ Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the Lord your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

¹⁶ Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹⁷ You shall not murder.^[d]

¹⁸ Neither shall you commit adultery.

¹⁹ Neither shall you steal.

²⁰ Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor.

²¹ Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife.

Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Moses the Mediator of God's Will

²² These words the Lord spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me. ²³ When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, you

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approached me, all the heads of your tribes and your elders; ²⁴ and you said, "Look, the Lord our God has shown us his glory and greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the fire. Today we have seen that God may speak to someone and the person may still live. ²⁵ So now why should we die? For this great fire will consume us; if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any longer, we shall die. ²⁶ For who is there of all flesh that has heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and remained alive? ²⁷ Go near, you yourself, and hear all that the Lord our God will say. Then tell us everything that the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and do it."

²⁸ The Lord heard your words when you spoke to me, and the Lord said to me: "I have heard the words of this people, which they have spoken to you; they are right in all that they have spoken. ²⁹ If only they had such a mind as this, to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, so that it might go well with them and with their children forever! ³⁰ Go say to them, 'Return to your tents.' ³¹ But you, stand here by me, and I will tell you all the commandments, the statutes and the ordinances, that you shall teach them, so that they may do them in the land that I am giving them to possess." ³² You must therefore be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn to the right or to the left. ³³ You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess

Opening jokes/comments: A woman is going to send an old family Bible in the mail to a relative. So, she wraps it up and places it carefully in a box and takes it to the Post Office. The postal clerk takes the package and weighs it and asks her, "Anything breakable in here?" She thinks for a moment and then replies, "Only the 10 Commandments."

A little boy was once asked by his Sunday school teacher if he knew the Ten Commandments. "No ma'am," came the reply, "my dad said that I don't have to know them since they are doing away with them anyway."

Periodically there is some brouhaha or fuss made about displaying the 10 Commandments in the legislature or in the State Supreme Court, oftentimes under the instigation of a legislator or other public official. In my cynical moments, I wonder if there is a correlation between a plummeting approval rating of these officials and the sudden desire to place these venerable statements of religious laws into secular courts of law.

I wouldn't mind so much placing the 10 commandments on public display in capital buildings and legislative assemblies, as long as everybody agreed to abide by them. But therein lies the rub. Far too often, the desire to place them on display is simply that: a display. What would

happen if we were to take them seriously as a basis for making laws and governing ourselves as a civil society? What might our society look like?

(Look at the image image of the 10 commandments monument surrounded by flags.) What is the first and second commandments? Thou shalt have no other gods before me, and no graven images. So, what does it mean when we engrave the 10 Commandments and place them in front of halls of government, people routinely lie to influence decisions, scheme about ways to take the resources of other nations, and plan wars and ways to kill people?

10 Commandments found in the midst of all the laws to govern the legal life as well as the sacrificial religious cult of Israel. Why have this big sacrificial apparatus if you have 10 commandments, which seems to cover the waterfront?

I have a theory, and it goes like this: we humans develop elaborate religious and legal structures designed to make atonement for our misdeeds because it's too much of a bother to actually do the good, right and honest thing.

Example: Not bearing false witness.

One of the greatest threats to truth-telling and honesty has been the Internet. The ability to remain anonymous, coupled with the lack of accountability for what one says and the means to verify what is said, added to the capability of spreading something exponentially around the world is a recipe for the pandemic spread of lies, gossip and slander.

I have here in my hand a copy of a story I received as an e-mail from a member of the church I served in 2001, after 9/11 had happened. The e-mail was a rather lengthy story about how a couple of professor from the University of Idaho and a group of students went in to a local restaurant and engage in a loud discussion of how there will be war atrocities in Afghanistan, and how stories of POWs in Vietnam was US propaganda, and so on. One of the patrons confronts them there is an argument, other patrons in the restaurant get involved, the students and professor leave, refusing to pay because of how they've been treated, the other patrons

take up a collection, someone starts singing God Bless America and everyone joins in, and so on. It's a lengthy e-mail, and I was shocked by it. I decided to do some checking, especially on the U of I website. It turned out that the University had received a lot of inquiries about the incident and had investigated. They contacted the restaurant involved, and nobody had ever witnessed any such event. The fact of the matter is that it had never happened. I sent an e-mail to my parishioner letting her know that the e-mail was untrue, and could she please send out an e-mail to the people to whom she had sent the original e-mail with the updated information? To the best of my knowledge, no such e-mail was ever sent. (. (See Snopes.com: "The Egghead and Aye," <http://www.snopes.com/rumors/egghead.asp>).

Why circulate such things? Why participate in the spreading of untruth? And what does it say about the church when so many so-called Christians are circulating them? I don't know how many outright false e-mails and comments on Facebook I received during the last four years about President Obama. We all have the right to disagree with policy decisions our lawmakers and president make. But none of us have the right to spread lies. Especially if we bear the name of Christ.

Yesterday, we engaged in some extended discussion of the growing percentage of the population who are done with churches, or who consider themselves "Spiritual But Not Religious." Many of these people have had experiences in churches where the very people who should be the most honest or have the most integrity have instead been the most keen to spread lies about someone or sponsor horrific causes. The number one reason people leave the church is because of hypocrisy. The very simple straightforward teachings of Jesus have been surrounded by a huge edifice of doctrines, rituals and litmus tests for faith that have nothing to do with Jesus, and sometimes even contradict what Jesus said. Let me share with you one litmus test that was applied to me when I went to serve the Joseph church...

This is why so many people are wanting to stay away from "religious people." SBNR

Image of wine and wineglass.

I've written a good deal about the relationship between religion and spirituality – about how religion and spirituality belong together. The image I use is to consider religion to be the container or carrier of spirituality, like a chalice holding wine. The chalice carries and contains the wine, and without the chalice, the wine would spill out on the floor. The wine needs the chalice in order to be available for drinking. The purpose of the chalice is to contain the wine. Each are dependent upon the other. Religion is an essential part of spirituality as its carrier.

A lot of accretions, additions and oversights applied to the simple wineglass path of Jesus. (Look at the picture of elaborate chalice covered in gold, with jewels and ornate decorations.

The words in Deuteronomy attributed to Moses, "You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess," remind us that we have been given a path to walk and to tend, not an institution or physical structure. Whereas it is important to attend to our building, we do not exist in order to take care of a building or an institution. We exist as the ekklesia, the called-out folks. We are people who respond to the invitation of God to live in completely new ways in the world, who have been called out to be healed by God from all the abusive and violent ways of behaving and treating people that surround us; to use our intelligence and talents to reorder society so that all people have access to those things that will help them achieve their full potential; to live lives of honesty, integrity, with compassion for all persons, and to stand up for those cast aside and spit upon by society.

I would like to hear from you, having heard what I just shared with you regarding all this. Reflecting upon what you know of what Jesus taught, what are some of the things that have been added to his path? Are they helpful or do they detract? What has been added to this vessel for containing the wine?

What are your observations?