



Sermon, March 19, 2017
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Sermon Series: Where Do We Go from Here?
“Basics”

Preparation to Receive Scripture: *What are some of the rules you live by?*

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-20 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

20:1 Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ 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. ⁵ 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 the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ 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.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

¹⁸ When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.” ²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.”

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?

For instance, if we took "thou shalt not kill" seriously, how might that effect our military spending and foreign policy decisions? What would we do with so-called religious leaders who suggest that we should assassinate the democratically elected leaders of foreign governments? What of the death penalty? What of abortion? How would our gun control laws change? Would we continue to allow entire industries to exist whose sole purpose is to produce weapons and other instruments of killing, death and destruction? Would we allow physician-assisted suicide? (You see, there's something here for everybody to squirm about.)

Or how about "Thou shalt not covet your neighbor's house or anything that belongs to your neighbor?" How might that change our national lust for the oil or other natural resources in other countries and lands? How might our real estate laws change? If we applied it

retroactively, would we actually return the land to the Native Americans? And what would happen to our economy if we didn't think that we had to have just what our neighbors have, or what the television tells us would make our lives complete? What would happen to the advertising industry?

Now, I suppose you might say that I'm overstating the case here a bit, and I suppose I am in order to make a point. And that point is as someone else has pointed out, they aren't the 10 Suggestions or the 10 Try-These-On-And-See-If-You-Like-Thems. They are called the 10 Commandments with good reason: They were given by God to Moses and the Israelites as the basic principles upon which they were to live as the people of God.

Rabbis throughout the centuries have carefully studied the Torah and calculated the number of actual commandments there are. Moses Maimonides in the 12th Century finalized a list of 613 commandments given by God in the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible. No wonder that rabbis in Jesus time were searching for the greatest commandment that summed them all up. Do you remember what Jesus cited as the greatest commandment(s)? (*Congregational Responses*)

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind....' And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:37-39).

We can think of these as describing the vertical and horizontal dimensions of life. Vertical: the first 4 commandments describe our relationship with God ("You shall love the Lord your God..."). The next 6 describe our relationship with our neighbor ("You shall love your neighbor as yourself").

So let's spend some time together reflecting together about what these commandments might mean for us today, and the implications for our world if we were to take them seriously.

Group Reflection

- What basic things are central to faith, and what are details specific to a certain era and time?

Commandments 1-4: Loving God

1. YHWH is God. No other god.

Comment: God has a claim on my life. Nothing else has an ultimate claim upon my life.

2. No idols.

Someone else has defined an idol as that for which we would be willing to die, or which can command us to kill. Think about that one for a moment. Anything that has this sort of control over my life has stepped into the place of the LORD my God.

3. No wrongful use of God's name.

I have a joke I use with people who ask me if I can't do something about the weather or the stock market because of my "connections with the Man upstairs." I say that I don't believe in using my influence unduly. That is a humorous way of understanding the more important idea that God doesn't exist for my purposes - I exist for God's purposes.

4. Remember the Sabbath.

The practice of keeping a Sabbath reminds me that I was not created for work, nor was I created for endless drudgery. I was created for God.

Commandments 5-10: Loving Neighbor

5. Honor father and mother.

I honor my parents when I emulate their good and loving qualities, and when I learn from their mistakes, not judging them harshly, but realizing that the only instructions any of us come into the world with are the words "Love me."

6. No murder and killing.

It is not enough not to kill, or to be against war or murder or violence. I know that I need to work for just relationships between all persons in all levels of society.

7. No adultery.

The next commandment reminds me of the importance of commitment and loyalty.

8. No stealing.

9. No false witness.

10. No coveting.

And finally, there's my neighbor. Don't steal, don't bear false witness or spread lies or untruths or even half-truths about others, and don't covet what others have. For me, these all have to do with respecting other people – respecting their dignity and integrity as persons, and if they give me reason to think otherwise, then I need to respect them at least as persons who are likewise loved by God, for whom Christ also died. If I take away their land or their property or even their dignity or integrity as persons, which is what bearing false witness is really all about, then I might as well as have tried to kill them – because I am denying them an essential aspect of being created in the image of God.

Practice
life:

Rule of Life: Write down your top three rules for your

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.