

“And God Spoke”
Exodus 20:1-20
Pollocksville Presbyterian Church
Sermon #73
18th Sunday After Pentecost
30th Sunday in the COVID-19 Pandemic
10.4.20

Exodus 20:1-20 CEB

20 Then God spoke all these words:

2 I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3 You must have no other gods before me.

4 Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the Lord your God, am a passionate God. I punish children for their parents’ sins even to the third and fourth

generations of those who hate me. 6 But I am loyal and gracious to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 Do not use the Lord your God's name as if it were of no significance; the Lord won't forgive anyone who uses his name that way.

8 Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. 9 Six days you may work and do all your tasks, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you. 11 Because the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything that is in them in six days, but rested on the seventh day. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 Do not kill.

14 Do not commit adultery.

15 Do not steal.

16 Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.

17 Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's house. Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

18 When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the horn, and the mountain smoking, the people shook with fear and stood at a distance. 19 They said to Moses, "You

“speak to us, and we’ll listen. But don’t let God speak to us, or we’ll die.”

20 Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you don’t sin.”

The Word of the LORD. **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

It's been a long three months since the Hebrews escaped Egypt. They've witnessed the dramatic displays of God's power as an oppressed people in Egypt, they celebrated the first Passover, they crossed the sea and witnessed the destruction of Pharaoh's army, God provided them food in the desert, and God provided water from a rock.

Now, here we are with the Hebrews. Just out from Rephidim and into the Sinai desert where they have set up camp. God has instructed Moses to come up to the top of Mount Sinai to meet the LORD because the LORD has something to say. We've called them the Ten Commandments for so long, but these are actually Ten Words. Ten phrases from God about how to live our lives. These verses affirm the care of the elderly, marriage, and security of

person and property. It is here with the Decalogue, the Ten Words, spoken by God that begin the second half of Exodus. And that is important.

Everything up to Exodus 20, while very necessary, is a prologue. How did the Hebrews get to this point? How did our spiritual ancestors respond to God's delivering them from slavery and genocide? It's here in Exodus 20 that these statements from God essentially divide this book into two equal parts. So, that should give us a clue as to how central today's verses truly are.

Now, you've heard me say "Ten Words", "ten phrases", or "Decalogue" versus "Ten Commandments". It's an important distinction because God is laying out another covenant for the

Israelites. And if you recall, God is good on God's promises. It's not a one way street, the people have a responsibility, too! For example, in verses two and three:

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt,

Out of the house of slavery.

You must have no other gods before me.

God IS! God is the God of their ancestors and God is their God!

God brought them out of Egypt and the Hebrews must honor God

by not putting other gods before the LORD God of Heaven and

Earth!

Exodus 20 is the point of no return: Adhere to the covenant or face the future on their own.¹ Up to this point, God has done so much for the Hebrews, God has been patient, and God has been gracious, but there has been a lot of complaining. And now, like any parent would do, God is laying down the ground rules. Like anyone would do when interacting with co-workers, adults, students, or anyone else, God is setting the boundaries.

These boundaries are necessary. And boundaries are necessary for our life. For example, there are boundaries when negotiating the terms of call for a pastor: Financial, vacation, sick leave, parental leave, and expectations of all parties. There are boundaries between two people who are committed to each other. Sometimes, we have to put up boundaries between friends when one has not

¹ O. Wesley Allen, Jr., ed. *The Preacher's Bible Handbook*. WJK Press: Louisville, 2019, 17.

acted appropriately. Boundaries are needed so we respect a person's time.

There are lots of examples, but that's what the Decalogue is and what it begins for the latter part of Exodus: A set of boundaries and expectations from God to the people and the people to God.

These words from God spoken to the people have several aspects: They deal with the relationship between God and Israel, Israel and Creation, and Israel with itself. The Ten Commandments is more than a plaque or monument that we hang up. They begin a series of boundaries. For the Hebrews, they have to be.....reminded of who they are and whose they are. And if you haven't noticed, we in 21st century Pollocksville, NC have to be reminded, too.

In every word in the Decalogue, in every description, there is love. And love sets boundaries to protect us. It's necessary for human life. The Ten Commandments and the rest of the laws to follow in Exodus and beyond are not vindictive. God is not right there ready for us to screw up just so God can throw lightning or plagues on us! The Law starting in Exodus 20 is to give us instruction on how to live as God's children, with creation, and with each other.

Because the LORD our God brought us out of sin and death, like our spiritual ancestors, we are to put God first in our lives. Because God rested on the seventh day, we are to rest, we have to love ourselves and be kind to ourselves in order to serve each other.

Because God made an abundant earth, we are not to steal! We are

not to steal from the earth, not to harm natural habitats just to make a quick buck, and not to steal from others who struggle.

Because God desires to live in communion with us and for us to live in communion with each other, we tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth! Lies have nothing to offer except heartache and destruction. They destroy relationships.

No, the Law is not vindictive and God is not ready to strike us when we screw up, because we will screw up. That's part of human nature! God has given us the Law to live at peace with God, neighbor, and self.

I think it can be summed up perfectly in Exodus 20:19-20. The people, after hearing these commandments, were fearful. They stood at a distance.

They said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we'll listen.

But don't let God speak to us, or we'll die."

Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid, because God has come only to test you and to make sure you are always in awe of God so that you don't sin."

Don't be afraid. God is making sure that we don't sin. God is trying to protect us. Just like a momma does with her children, God gentle leads a slightly dysfunctional, but loved and chosen band of people. And praise God, while we cannot follow the Law perfectly, Love Made Flesh, Jesus Christ, who came among us FULFILLED the

Law and the Prophets. In Jesus Christ, we have an example of how we follow the Law which can be summed up as this: Love the LORD your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. Because of the Holy Spirit's power, we can do that.

As we go forward, let us remember the boundaries that God has set up for us. Boundaries set out of love. Boundaries set to make sure we can thrive in our own journeys to the Promised Land.

Siblings in Christ, believe this Good News!

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer. Amen.