

Third Sunday in Lent March 6 2024

Exodus 20:1-17

The ending of Psalm 19 is the way many of the preachers I grew up started their sermons and is a prayer, a plea that I have also used- so please join me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

We have in our first reading, another covenant between God and humans. We have had the one between God and Noah (all creation) with its sign being? The rainbow. The next between God and Abraham and Sarah. That God will be their God and give them a land and they are to be faithful. And its sign is? Circumcision. The one today is between God and Moses and the Israelites. And it gets more specific. I will be your God and you will have the promised land, but here (specifically) is what it looks like to be faithful.

I personally find it to be helpful to periodically go through these Ten Commandments and look at them in detail. It is one of the gifts of teaching Confirmation because I get to do that. Luther believes that in these commandments we find out much about God, ourselves, and our relationship to God and each other. But that lies a bit out of our scope today because everyone wants to see the Iowa/Ohio State game.

So, let's look at where it all starts. I am the Lord your God- I have brought you out of slavery in Egypt. Or to use Colossians language, I have brought you out of bondage from the realm of the darkness of sin. I will bring you to the land of milk and honey, into the light of the reign of my son Jesus. So,

act like it. Act like I have done those things. And if you've forgotten what that means let's go back to the beginning.

I am THE ONE. I am a jealous God, I won't share you with anyone or anything. Not the Iowa Women's Basketball Team, or Tik Tok, or wealth. Not with power, or drugs, or politicians. You think it is punishment, but when you don't follow who you are and who I have claimed you to be- there are consequences- ones beyond the reality of sin that is loose in the world in cancer and accidents. Consequences that follow you and your family when you follow other gods.

How long for those who reject God? Three generations. How long is God faithful to us? To the thousandth generation of those who love him. Your love for God brings benefits to those after you for 40,000 years. This shows God's love is vastly more than any consequences.

So, God seems to say in these commandments, just do as Jesus said. Remember, when he is asked which is the greatest commandment? What does he say? Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. Now, heart, soul, mind, and strength don't mean to us what they meant to those in Palestine, but they are a shorthand way of saying, love God – be faithful to God- with everything that makes up who you are. With your intellect, your personality and character, with your body and actions, with your intent and perseverance.

Love God with the dedication you give to football stats and sports. With the same detail you give to fishing and video gaming. With the same focus and attention you give to your children's education and upbringing.

Why does Jesus say this? Love God with all that you are.

What is the thing you obsess over, think about always? What is the thing that shapes who you are and what you do?

That is your god. And too often, I wonder if that is not the one who created you and all that exists. Who sent Jesus to show God's love for the world.

St. Augustine has a prayer that I have used during Lent before:

O Lord,
The house of my soul is narrow;
enlarge it that you may enter in.
It is ruinous, O repair it!
It displeases Your sight.
I confess it, I know.
But who shall cleanse it,
to whom shall I cry but to you?
Cleanse me from my secret faults, O Lord,
and spare Your servant from strange sins.

The house of my soul is narrow... It latches onto these puny gods and seems to be full. Leaving no room for You. Who ought to be first.

The Temple is gone when John is writing our gospel for this morning. I don't think Jesus is against the Temple itself. The critique of Jesus that they are turning a house of prayer into a shopping mall is that this is too narrow an understanding of what it means to be faithful to God.

To allow for the immensity of that meaning- Jesus drives out those things that are crowding it out. The economy of faith. Not the fullness of it.

The gods we follow are too small and limited. They look awfully big and important. With their billions of dollars, billions of views, billions of followers. With the power of whether we have a job or get a good grade.

But they only look so big because the house of our soul is so narrow.

O Lord,

The house of my soul is narrow;

enlarge it that you may enter in.

Transfer me from devotion to these lesser gods and into full devotion to you. A devotion that means everything starts with you. That sees your sabbath as a gracious intrusion into the economy of the world. A reminder that you are God and we aren't. That the world will roll along just fine without us. That there are more important things to pursue. Rest, Relationship- with God and with each other.

O Lord,

The house of my soul is narrow;

enlarge it that you may enter in.

That I may love you with all that I am.

And- that I may love my neighbor as myself.

I appreciate what the Rev. Dr. Rolf Jacobson said, the commandments are not about us being better people and getting God to love us more. How could God love us more than God has through sending Jesus to us? The commandments are about how we can love our neighbor well.

This love is not an emotion- it is not how we feel about our neighbor.

Rather it is an action/ an attitude. It is about HOW we love. Just as faith is

a verb, so too is love. And these commandments guide us in how we love one another.

I love my neighbor by honoring my parents and all those in authority over me. By assuming they do have something to offer to my life and understanding. By not killing my neighbor out of hand with words or actions. By honoring the relationships they are in and not trying to take for myself what is theirs- either in people or property. By keeping the 8th commandment and always looking at what they do in the best possible way. To assume the best of them and their motives in any given situation. That's how I love my neighbor.

Abraham Lincoln said that a house divided against itself cannot stand. He got that from God. Who saw in the Israelites post slavery a people who only knew how to live according to a human way of thinking. Devote yourself to a human (Pharoah) and trust in him to save you. Take what you can before the other guy got it. Kill, lie, cheat, steal to protect you and yours. When God saw this God knew God had to train them in another way. Because that way, the human way, lies destruction. And God's desire from the beginning for us has been life. Life that truly is life!

This is the foolish truth that Jesus and his apostle Paul want us to see. You have been claimed by God as beloved children through the waters of baptism. Transferred from the reign of the darkness of sin into the reign of heaven- where Jesus rules. This has happened through the foolishness of the death of Jesus on the cross. A death that absorbed all the hatred and sin that we humans could throw at him and still he loved us, "Father, forgive them...they don't know what they are doing." This has come to you not

because of anything you do but because God has chosen you. God has done this.

So, since you are beloved children of God made holy and blameless through Christ, just be what you are. And if you forget- join with the other siblings in Christ as we regularly gather around Word and Sacrament to be reminded of who we are. And who God is. As we practice what it means to love our neighbors by forgiving them, supporting them, helping them. As we are fed in this Meal of Christ's own body and blood, food to help that faith settle deep into our bones until we both are one.

O Lord,

The house of my soul is narrow;

enlarge it that you may enter in.

That I may love you with all that I am.

And- that I may love my neighbor as myself. Amen.