



Third Sunday in Lent

March 4, 2018 – 9:00 a.m.

Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor

Theme: GOD GAVE THE LAW FOR THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE!

Sermon Text: Exodus 20 And God spoke all these words:

²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³“You shall have no other gods before^a me.

⁴“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

⁸“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹²“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land 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 give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

We live in an era when many people in the world pay little heed to the Word of God, especially in the greater Seattle area. The authority of Scripture is maligned on multiple fronts, even within the pale of the church. Yet despite that, we still trust that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word that the Holy Spirit “breathed into” (2 Tim. 3:16) the prophets, apostles

and evangelists for our edification. With that in mind, we turn to our first lesson from Exodus 20. Picture the scene: The Israelites are bivouacked beneath the base of Mount Sinai. God has descended upon its peak in fire, and Sinai trembled. God called Moses to climb its slopes and meet with Him on the mountain. There He gave Moses the words that we heard in our sermon text: **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”**

God cared mightily for His people. He had a deep desire to protect them from whatever might harm their souls and bodies. So, He gave the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel to guide them in their relationship with Him and with their fellow man—all within the framework of His everlasting covenant of grace and mercy. They’d be His people, and He’d be their God. Commandments 1-3 focused on the peoples’ relationship with the Lord. Commandments 4-10 governed their dealings with their fellow man. This moral law of God—along with the ceremonial law that regulated their religious life—would guide them as they entered, and dwelt, in the Promised Land of Canaan. Undoubtedly,

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In His mercy, the Lord delivered His chosen people from their bondage in Egypt and led them on their exodus to the **“good and spacious land”** (Ex. 3:8) He first promised to the patriarch Abraham. As they travelled through the desert, God established a new relationship with the Israelites. They’d already witnessed His mighty power in their escape from Egypt, at the waters of the Red Sea and now here at Mount Sinai, where Jehovah appeared to them in His mercy and said:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, ‘We will do everything the LORD has said.’ So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD” (Ex. 19:4-8)

God’s law served a protective role in His people’s lives. To start with, the Lord wanted Israel to turn away from the false gods that the Egyptians worshipped and the ones they would encounter among the pagan tribes that inhabited the land of Canaan. The Lord said of Himself, **“I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God.”** We don’t typically think of jealousy as a godly attribute. In fact, the Lord condemns it. But here, when He applies that term to Himself, He means that He wanted His people all for Himself—not because He’s narcissistic by nature, but because He knew far better than they did what was in their best interests. He, alone, was—and is—the one true God; He, alone, was—and is—the God of all grace! So He urges them:

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments”

God established a moral code of conduct as a **“curb”** to keep our fallen race from degenerating into anarchy. He gave His law to Israel in the form of the Ten Commandments. But, God had already etched His law on every human heart since the Fall into sin. He implanted a **“moral compass”** within man’s soul and the voice of conscience

that testifies to it. That's why everyone knows, instinctively, the difference between right and wrong. That's why every tribe and race from every time and place has its own set of rules that closely mirror God's unchanging moral code He set in stone in the Ten Commandments. People of every society, no matter how primitive, know it's wrong to physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually or sexually abuse their neighbor. In every civilization, children are taught to obey their parents, respect their elders and submit to the governing authorities. Theft, robbery and extortion are against the law universally. People tend to feel guilty when they violate their conscience—a silent nod to the God who created them.

But guilt isn't enough to keep us from falling into the same well-worn rut of sinful behavior over and over again. It wasn't enough for the Israelites, either. In fact, while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, the children of Israel convinced his brother Aaron to gather up all of the gold that the Egyptians had given them—gold that the Lord had intended to be used to adorn the sacred articles of His tabernacle—and cast a golden calf for them to venerate. They indulged in pagan revelry before it. No doubt the wine flowed liberally during their carnal celebration along with the bawdy behavior that inevitably accompanies the disinhibition brought on by drunkenness. That's the sordid scene Moses found when he reached the foot of Sinai, and he burned with anger! Sadly, the Israelites were no better, by nature, than their "heathen" neighbors.

And neither are we, my friends. When we take a good, long look into the "mirror" of God's moral law it shows us what we're really like by nature. And it ain't pretty! Even when we try like crazy, we still can't fulfill God's righteous demands. We can't satisfy the law's requirements, live up to its standard or do anything to atone for our comeuppance. Stuck between a rock and a hard place, we're forced to confess as the Apostle Paul does in his letter to the Christians in Rome:

"For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it" (7:18-20). God's law lays out what to do, and what not to do, to please Him. But our old Adam rears its ugly head and stubbornly refuses to comply. God's verdict against us is as clear as His demands: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23a). Thankfully, so is His solution: "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (6:23b).

Without Christ, we're powerless to "do good and avoid evil" as my sainted father-in-law used to say when asked what the Sunday sermon had been about. So Jesus "did good and avoided evil" in our place—and He did both to perfection! The Apostle Paul vividly describes for us the results of all that our Savior did for you, for me and for all mankind. He writes:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4)

By the gift of faith—a gift God worked within us by the power of His Spirit—we believe in Jesus as our Lord and Savior and appropriate His gracious blessings! In Christ, we are able to obey God's law—and we strive to, in gratitude for His grace!

Christ didn't abolish the law. He fulfilled it for us. But the law still has its place. It still serves as a **"curb"** to check the gross outbreak of sin in societies; it still acts as a **"mirror"** to show us the ways in which we've disobeyed the Lord; and for us, for Christians, it serves a third function: it **"guides"** us in godly living. Since the moment we were born again by water and the Word in Baptism, God's Spirit has filled us with the desire to keep the Ten Commandments; to love the Lord our God above all else and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. As Paul told pastor Timothy, the law serves as a **"training"** course **"in righteousness"** (2 Tim. 3: 16), teaching us the kinds of works God calls good. No better guide for godly living exists than the Ten Commandments! As those who've been **"brought from death to life"** (Rom. 6:13) we *want* to live lives that glorify God and bless our fellow man.

Paul writes, **"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do"** (Eph. 2:10). Because of Christ, we walk in God's commands, and He rejoices over us. He deals with us in mercy, **"showing love to a thousand generations of those who love [Him] and keep [His] commandments"**—including you and me in this present generation. Praise the Lord today that He gave us His Ten Commandments to guide us in godly living! Amen.