

October 5, 2020 18th Sunday after Pentecost World Communion Sunday

Psalm 19

1 The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
2 Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.
3 There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;
4 yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
5 which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
6 Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat.
7 The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
12 But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults.
13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.
14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-17

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.

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.

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.

Covenant of the Law

West Asheville PC(USA)

Today we read a text from the book of Exodus, and it is a text that is often referred to as a Covenant of the Law. For many people outside the faith, and for some inside, this is a text that describes the ‘shall nots’ of our faith, but I believe it is much more than that.

This text begins with the powerful statement, “I am the LORD your God.” It says let there be no doubt; no misunderstanding, the God of Noah and Abraham is our Lord. It doesn’t matter if we believe in God; it doesn’t matter if we worship the Lord with all our being; it doesn’t matter if we are faithful, the Lord is our God. Then God does an amazing thing, God outlines how Israel, and we, will live in relationship with God and one another.

We have talked about this text before. We have discussed how this text provides rules, commandments, the very word of God about we should live without sin. But this text is also about how we are to live in **relationship** with God and with one another.

I wonder if we understand the significance of this text for Israel, **and for us**. In the time of Abraham, and in the time of the Hebrews as they escaped Egypt, people worshiped many gods. They had no personal knowledge of their gods, they simply believed that the world was ruled by these gods, and that these gods had to be pleased with humanity before they would respond to the needs of people. The people of the nations believed that the only way to please the gods was to offer sacrifices to those gods. So they made sacrifices to the god of rain, the god of the harvest, the god of fertility, and every other aspect of their world. They made these sacrifices without any assurance that their sacrifices would please the gods, they simply did it and prayed that the gods would be pleased.

With the call of Abraham, all this changed. God's call of Abraham was the beginning of a new way to know who was responsible for the goodness of the world. God's call of Abraham was the beginning of a personal relationship with **the Creator of all the earth**. Abraham now knew which god was the true God, and he knew that God was concerned for his future and well being. And his relationship with Yahweh was a simple one: God asked that Abraham believe in the One True God, and Yahweh would bless Abraham with many descendants.

Our text from Exodus is a continuing revelation of the special nature of the **One True God**. By the gift of this law, the Hebrews were given a clear vision of how to live in relationship with Yahweh, **and how to live in relationship with one another**.

God is speaking to the people who have fled the armies of Pharaoh, the people who were slaves in Egypt thru Moses. Their lives have been about working for the benefit of Pharaoh, and they have lost all concept of what it means to direct their own lives. **Now they are free, but they are not a people**, they have no deep understanding of who God is, nor do they know how to live together in a community with one another. They have no law, no code of conduct, no guidelines of what is right or wrong. They have very little idea of how to be free, and they don't even know they need guidelines for their future as a people. So God freely **GIFTS** them with a code, a vision of how to be a people, and how to live before the God who has heard their groans and prayers for deliverance.

The gift of the Law to the Hebrews was a turning point in their and our history. The Law was a gift to us as the beginning of a new way to live in relationship **with one another and with God**.

The Ten Commandments proclaim how we live in relationship with our Lord when we are told there shall not be any other gods in our lives. We are told to not use the Lord's name in vain, nor carve any false images of God since God is so much bigger than any image we could craft. We are told to make a day of rest and worship of God, a fundamental piece of our weekly lives. When we **hear and obey** these commandments, we know clearly who our Lord is and how our lives will be blessed by living in relationship with the God of Abraham.

The Law goes on to say there can be no peace in the land, if we fear for our property, so we are told '**Thy shall not steal**.' The Law says there can be no peace in the land if we fear for the sanctity of our marriages, so we are told '**Thy shall not commit adultery**.' The Law says there can be no peace in the land if we fear for our lives, so we are told '**Thy shall not kill**.' The Ten Commandments are the beginning of a vision for a nation, an earth, where **peace and justice will be the rule**, not simply a hope.

Yes, the Ten Commandments are a list of ‘Shall nots.’ They are rules for living justly, rules that as humans who are willful and broken we need, but they are also God’s words for a blessed life as we live in a covenant of relationship with our Creator who desires our lives to be blessed, and in covenant with all others who are also a part of God’s creation.

The Ten Commandments were a new covenant of relationship, and in Easter we are given a clearer vision of what it means to be a people of the covenant. Just as God freely gave the Law to the Hebrews to teach them about relationship, **in the birth, life and death of Christ**, God freely offers us a vision of what it means to worship a god of relationship, instead of a mysterious god that lives on some remote mountaintop, or in the depths of the sea.

Today is World Communion Sunday, a day of very special relationship, communion, with our Lord and our sisters and brothers around the world. The title ‘World Communion’ is partly derived from the theology that we are one people with One True God and as such a people we are joined or In Communion With, all peoples. When John Calvin lead the Christian church in Geneva, he felt so strongly in this Communion he wanted the Lord’s Supper celebrated every Sunday in every church. The state directed the life of the church, as did most European countries, and it denied his request. As Elder in the Church of Switzerland, Calvin designed a plan that allowed ‘Communion’ to served in some church of Geneva every Sunday. **He was committed to this sacrament.**

As God desired communion of the people with God, we desire communion with God, and in Christ we have been given a new sign of this communion. Wherever you are today, let us come before God the Father, the Christ, the Holy Spirit this day.

Wherever you are as you read this, Take a moment with your family, or friends, to remember the blessings the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, symbolizes for our lives and give thanks.

OUR RESPONSE TO THE WORD.

PRAYER OF GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise to the Lord.....

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

BREAKING OF THE BREAD, POURING OF THE CUP

When Jesus and his disciples began the Passover meal, Jesus took Bread, and after giving thanks, broke it, Saying, “This is my body broken for you. Take, share, eat and remember me.:

After the meal, Jesus took the Cup and said, “This is the cup of salvation, filled with my blood, shed for the forgiveness of YOUR sins. Take, drink, each of you.”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Every time we eat this bread and drink of this cup we proclaim the saving grace of our Lord’s life and death until the time He gathers home with Him.”

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

THE SENDING

Let us go out: witnessing to the Love of God revealed in Christ, seeking justice for all of God's creation, daring to be disciples of Jesus, who asks nothing less than our all, and who shapes and enables us to be, and do, more than we can imagine. Amen.