

Love Me and Keep My Commandments

Meditation on Exodus 20:1-17

March 4, 2018

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

20 Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before^[a] me. ⁴You 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. ⁵You 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, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation^[b] of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. ⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹For 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. ¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³You shall not murder.^[c] ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵You shall not steal. ¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷You 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.

The Preschool hosted a rummage sale Friday and Saturday. They offered all sorts of things at bargain prices--glasses and wood or ceramic kitty cats; a clock that played Mozart or Vivaldi on the hour. Lamps and tables.

Clothes and shoes. Toys and golf clubs and golf carts. An ice cream maker-- barely used-- or a waffle iron, still in its box. It was, as they say, "Everything but the kitchen sink," only they had a kitchen sink, too, thanks to the Ritters! So far, the sale has raised more than \$400 for this important ministry to young families in our community.

I went on Friday and marveled at the "treasures" that people choose to keep or give away. I dropped off my donations, and brought home a few more, much to my husband's amusement. I bought a beautiful oriental carpet and a ceramic water pitcher with purple iris that reminds me of my yard in York, PA, years ago and all the perennials, bulbs and iris that bloomed every spring.

The items are even more special to me because they belonged to friends. I will always think of them affectionately when I see the carpet and water pitcher in my home.

I will **keep them** close to my heart.

The people of God spend 11 months at the foot of Mount Sinai waiting for Moses to bring God's Word to them. They arrive in the wilderness of Sinai on the "third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt." Time is marked by how long it has been since their release from captivity, just as the Lord identifies himself in our passage today by recalling what he has done for them thus far, *²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*"

This is a God who hears the cries of his people and mercifully responds. In the chapter before this one, God compares himself to an eagle in his

rescue of his people. He says, “You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” The image of God as an eagle carrying His people is later picked up by the prophet Isaiah in 40:31-- “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles...”

Now, at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God is drawing his people closer to himself, asking them to listen to his voice and **keep** his covenant so they may have the promise of being his “**treasured possession.**”

What we call The Ten “Commandments” are literally in Hebrew, “10 Words”-- *ha-d'varîm*. The word for “**keep**” appears in both the Deut. 5 and Exodus 20 accounts of the giving of the Ten Commandments. This keep-- *shamar* in Hebrew-- means to *hold onto, care for, watch, guard and protect*, such as when God places a human being in His Garden in Genesis and tells him to “till it and **keep** it.” *Shamar* appears again when Cain kills Abel. God asks Cain where Abel is. Cain answers, “I don’t know. Am I my brother’s **keeper?**”

When the Lord calls us to love him and **keep** his commands or words he doesn’t mean follow them halfheartedly, as we might follow laws made by human beings. These “words” are a covenant between God and his people; this is the way of life God desires for the health and wellbeing of the community. These 10 words, Jesus says in Matthew 22:34-40, are summed up in one word --LOVE. Love God with all your heart, soul and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

The first commands reveal our relationship with the Lord--that he alone is the one we worship and love, most of all. Nothing in this world should ever take his place. The Sabbath figures prominently in this list, taking up

what editors have divided into 3 verses. Not only are we to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, we are told how we may not spend this day; we may not work! This places our relationship with the Lord above what we do for a living; for it is the Lord who has created all things. Everything we have has come to us from His grace. What's more, we observe the Sabbath because God showed the way; he rested on and "blessed" the seventh day.

The commands that follow the Sabbath reflect our relationships with others. First, our parents--honor them, with the promise of long life. Then, our neighbors. The command not to murder means much more than that; we must do everything we can to guard and preserve our neighbor's life. For yes, Cain, we are our brothers' and sisters' **keepers!** The command against adultery means we should love our spouses and hold sacred the covenant of marriage. The command against "false witness"-- means that we should be honest and kind in our communications with others, only using our words for good. The warning against wrongful use of God's name doesn't just mean we shouldn't swear; it means we should always have the right attitude toward God and speak of him with reverence, gratitude and humility.

It's interesting that stealing and coveting are two separate commandments. They seem to me to stem from the same sin of greed. Jesus warns his followers to be on guard against greed in Luke 12:15. "Take care," he says, "For one's life does not consist of the abundance of possessions." The one who steals acts on the sins of greed and coveting. It is also interesting that coveting is the last command on the list--a prominent position-- and that there is so much detail about what not to covet-- not your neighbor's house, wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey,

or ANYTHING that belongs to your neighbor. Wouldn't it have been enough to say not "anything that belongs to your neighbor"? Coveting must be a big problem for the ancient people of God, as is idolatry, also in a prominent position at the top.

God's people still struggle to live in obedience to His commands. Let us remember that **keeping** them is a matter of the heart. If we love him, we show our love by our obedience, as Jesus says in John 14:15.

There are blessings for those who **keep** His commandments. We have the promise of God's love to the "thousandth generation." And there are other blessings, says Psalm 119, when we "delight" in God's law and "rejoice in following his statutes as one rejoices in great riches." We are strengthened and sustained. We receive wisdom and understanding, for God's word is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path. We are kept from sinning when we "hide" God's words in our heart and meditate on them.

"How can a young person stay on the path of purity?" the psalmist asks. "By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands."

I left the rummage sale Friday encouraged to see our congregation's support of our preschool ministry. Thank you, friends, for your kindness and generosity! It's not too late for folks to find a "treasure," as Pat Smith says, to take home. The sale continues today in the fellowship hall after worship. The Ritters' sink is still available!

Maybe you will find something that has special meaning to you. I hope that what you choose and keep close to your heart will remind you of this

message about keeping God's commands.

Let us delight in his teachings, his Words. Let us rejoice in them, hiding them in our hearts, as the psalmist did, so that we might not sin. When we obey the Lord, we show our love for Him. He has always been faithful to us, hearing our cries, answering our prayers with mercy and grace. He has sent His Son to rescue us and reconcile us with Him. He will love us always--to the "thousandth generation!" And when we are weary, he will lift us up on wings like eagles. And we will soar with Him.

Let us pray.

Holy One, we confess that we are often disobedient. We don't feel like loving all our neighbors, all of the time. We often struggle with discontentment, coveting what others have, wanting more. Forgive us, Lord. Thank you for your love and mercy and for using ordinary people to do your work. Thank you for the power and guidance of your Spirit and the generosity of volunteers and staff who give of themselves and their resources so that your kingdom may grow. Thank you for the children you have brought to our preschool. Please, Lord, we would welcome even more for our preschool and church! Thank you for the Scouts and the Academy with whom we share our facilities and campus. May we be a blessing to one another and dwell together in peace and unity. In Christ we pray. Amen.