

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Lent 3 – March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### **Exodus 20:1-17**

**And God spoke all these words: "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. "You shall not make for yourself an idol 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 fathers 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.**

**"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but 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 manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For 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.**

**"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."**

Dear Children of God,

When you hear the words, “Law, obey, submit, commandment,” do you have a positive reaction or a negative reaction? If you're anything like most of society, I'd imagine that your reaction is initially and primarily negative. Is it any wonder people have a problem with the Church? Those are big words in the Church, not hard words or wrong words, but important words. Those are words that are used frequently by those both inside and outside the Church. And I would argue, those are words that are often misunderstood and misused. And you proved my point already. You proved my point when your initial reaction to those words was negative, because there's nothing negative about those words. In fact, those are very positive words, when used correctly, when used the way God intended.

Maybe that's how you feel about the Ten Commandments that are before us today? Perhaps you hear, “Ten Commandments,” and you automatically have negative feelings? My goal this morning is that after spending time with God's Word, with these very familiar words, that you will view them differently. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will move all of us to rejoice that:

**Theme: God Rescues Us So We May Serve Him!**

- 1. In love God gives his Law**
- 2. Filled with God's love we obey his Law**

So what brought the Israelites and God to this point, to this giving of Commandments? The

Israelites had grown into a great nation during their time in Egypt. They had been blessed to have Joseph, one of Jacob's 12 sons, rise to second in command in Egypt. They had been given their own part of the country to live in and God blessed them tremendously. But after a time, a new Pharaoh came to power and saw the Israelites as a threat. So, he enslaved them and persecuted them. The Israelites cried out to God for help and he sent Moses to be their deliverer. And after ten horrible plagues, including the death of all the firstborn in Egypt, Pharaoh finally let the Israelites leave. And God brought them safely through the waters of the Red Sea, back towards their homeland, the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Three months into their journey, they arrived at Mount Sinai. This is the same mountain where God had appeared to Moses in a burning bush, where he had set his rescue plan in motion. And now God appears to the people again. And notice what he says, **“And God spoke all these words: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”**

How many of us realized that these were the words that began God's Words or Commands to Israel? Likely, we thought the Commandments start at verse three since that's what we call the First Commandment. And it's true, that is the first prohibition that God gives. However, did you notice that God didn't just start out with the prohibitions, the commands? What did God start out with? He started out with his name: **“I am the LORD your God.”**

So what? Doesn't that just tell us who this demanding law-giver is? Yes, God clearly identifies who he is—but the name he uses doesn't just indicate a law-giver. No, this name of God means so much more. If you looked at verse 2 in your service folder, you notice how LORD looks a little different than the rest of the words in the sentence. It's in what we call, “small caps.” The editors of our Bibles have done that to indicate this special name for God. This is the name that God used with Adam and Eve in the Garden when he gave them the first promise of the Savior. This is the name God used when he appeared to Moses the first time on Mount Sinai, out of that burning bush. This name for God is his covenant name, his saving name. When Israel heard this name, they thought of the God who makes and keeps his promises!

And just in case they didn't get it, look at what follows! **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”** There's proof in the pudding that this is someone who loves them and cares for them. This is someone who wants what's best for them. These are words spoken to a people who have been rescued, who have been redeemed, who have been brought out of slavery. These are people with whom God has a personal, covenant relationship.

Perhaps that term covenant is familiar, yet unfamiliar. A covenant was an agreement, an arrangement of sorts. Each party in the covenant made a commitment to do something. The words of the Ten Commandments are part of a covenant that God made with his people. It's similar to a contract of today. So what was the motivation for the covenant? It was love. God showed his love to his people by rescuing them from slavery in Egypt. He showed them his love by giving them a set of guidelines to follow that would be for their good. The people now had the opportunity to show their love to God by following these directives. God's opening words show that these laws are not intended to serve as a way to salvation. They are not a way of earning credit with God. They are not directions for how to become God's people. These laws are a guide for people that already had been redeemed by God's grace. By following these guides, the people of Israel could show their love and gratitude for the grace and mercy

they had just received and all the other blessings that were to follow. These commandments not only teach Israel what they have been rescued from, but what they have been rescued for—obedience.

All of a sudden these commandments take on a whole different light, don't they? You want to know why your initial reaction to words like obey, submit, commandment, and law was negative? That's your Old Adam's reaction. Your Old Adam is completely self-serving and self-seeking. He has to be number 1. And so anything that hints at someone telling you what to do or someone being more important than you is going to get him riled up. Your Old Adam scoffs at the commandments. He tells you that God's just trying to limit your fun, your enjoyment of life. He says, "What's the point of being freed from slavery to sin if you're just enslaved again by law?" Paul couldn't not have put it better when he said to the Romans, **"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so."** And that's the truth of it. The Law sets the standard for living, but we never measure up. By nature we can't and we don't want to.

And that's why Lent is for sinners. Lent points us to our Savior. And even though the name of Jesus isn't mentioned in these verses, he's here. He's here in God's special, covenant name, the LORD. For it's that name of God that made the promise to Adam and Eve. It's that name of God that repeated and affirmed the promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's that name of God that Jesus himself used when questioned by the Pharisees. It's that name of God that kept his promise and sent his Son to keep all of the commandments listed here, perfectly, in our place. And by that perfect life and by his innocent sacrifice for all of our sins, God rescued us from our slavery to sin. Paul again says to the Romans: **"For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."**

Because of what Jesus has done for us, we can look at these commandments in a whole different light. Rather than looking at the commandments as restricting laws that inhibit our freedom, we can view them as liberating guides that our Savior God gives us as opportunities to love -- to love him and to love our neighbors.

Martin Luther referred to the works that we do out of love and thanksgiving to God as his "masks." We are the masks of God when we love our neighbor as ourselves. We are the masks of God when we willingly submit ourselves to one another out of reverence for Christ. We are the masks of God when we look at the commandments as opportunities to love rather than restrictive laws. We show people God by being his masks. We bring people God's love by serving them in loving, willing obedience to God's commands. God doesn't need our service. **"The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it."** the psalmist writes. God doesn't need our service, but our neighbor does! Just think about how this view of these commandment changes our view of words like submit and obey. Why would I want to submit to someone else? Perhaps as a way to show them the love and commitment I've made to them? Perhaps as a way to model the love and commitment God has made to me? Why would I want to obey God's laws? Perhaps, because my Savior God, who lived and died to save me, to rescue me, might just know what's best for me? Perhaps because he's already proven that he doesn't want to harm me?

My fellow rescued sinners, our God has made a covenant with us. God promises to love us, to give himself up for us, to make us holy, washing away our sins through Baptism, giving us a beautiful garment

to wear, without stain, or wrinkle or any other blemish. God promises to protect us and keep us. How can we say thanks enough? How can we show our love in return? God give us a guide. He gives us a guide that not only says thanks to him, but also is what's best for us! It's truly the best of both worlds. Submit, obey, commandment, law—hopefully those words don't seem so bad anymore! May you view them in the positive light they display when they're viewed through the lens of God's love. AMEN