

[sermon Exodus 19-20 10 Comms]

EXODUS 19:3-7; 20:1-17

SAT/SUN, OCTOBER 6/7, 2018
(MATT 5:17-20)

FIRST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PR. SCOTT FULLER

Sinners and Saints

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Please join me in prayer: *Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

As I mentioned earlier, last week Sara preached on the story of the Israelites' escape from the Egyptians that appeared to be over before it really began! The people had been enslaved for 400 years, when God called Moses to convince Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, to let his people go.

After 10 terrible plagues, the king finally gave in and sent the Israelites away, their arms full of gold and jewels from the defeated Egyptians. Yet no sooner had they left, than Pharaoh once more changed his mind and sent his army of chariots out to drag the people back.

Literally caught between *Pharaoh's army and the deep, blue sea*, God opened a way for the people through the water, then caused the sea to swallow up the Egyptian army. End of story, right? The Israelites are free – what more could they need?

Indeed – they suddenly had their freedom...but...had literally no idea how to make it work. They were wandering in the wilderness without a compass, or *how-to* book to guide them.

Well, that problem is fixed in our bible story for today: God gives Moses the 10 Commandments to help the Israelites make life work.



OK – turn to page 1160 in the back of your hymnals and we will run through the 10 commandments. I'll call out the number and you all read it out loud together.

1. No other gods
2. Don't mis-use God's name
3. Honor the Sabbath Day
4. Honor Mom and Dad
5. Don't murder
6. Don't commit adultery
7. Don't steal
8. Don't lie about your neighbor
9. & 10. Don't covet your neighbor's stuff or relationships

Which would you say is the most important?

On the one hand, they are all important. But Martin Luther once said that if we could just get the first Commandment right, then all the others would be a snap. If we could figure out a way to get rid of all the other gods in our lives: money, power, worry, pride, anger – if we could somehow rid ourselves of those taskmasters, then we'd be able to worship the true Master in purity and truth. Would you agree?

Do you remember when Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest? He answered, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

In other words, Jesus boiled down the entire law, the entire bible, into one commandment with two directions: love God, love your neighbor.

Short and sweet – that's all we need to do. Boil down the entire bible to that two-armed command and life will be a snap...or will it???

Over the centuries, the Jewish leaders discovered that there were a few gaps between some of the commandments, so instead of boiling them down, these scholars actually developed 613 additional laws to help clarify the original ten.

For example – the 5th commandment says “You shall not murder.” It’s a command that’s very clear – but...it doesn’t cover everything about life and death. So, they added to that original order, for example, commandment #27 which says that not only shall a person not murder, but neither is it right for a person *to stand by idly when a human life is in danger*.

So murdering someone is wrong – but it is just as wrong to stand by and let a person die... make sense? I think we understand that. I mean, we all have rules in addition to the 10 Commandments for how to make life work in our families, right?

So what we’re going to do now, is take a couple of minutes to think of those extra rules in our lives – either those when you were growing up or those you have in your current household. You can include any of them from *Eat everything on your plate* to the **curfew** when you’re out on a **date**.



Now please turn to your neighbor, or, if you’re a Confirmation student taking sermon notes, find an adult and talk with them about the extra rules you have to live with. For those of you adults who are introverts, you can just think about them or write some down.

Everybody ready? 2 minutes – let’s go...

[interlude]

Time to share – what are some of the household rules that you grew up with – or follow now?

Are these laws – the 10 commandments and our household rules – are they easy or hard to follow?

It kinda depends, doesn't it? However, they are all designed to keep us and our neighbors safe.

And that is the very purpose of the law: it is both PROTECTIVE and RESTRICTIVE.



Luther described the law as a fence around our hearts. It's a protective fence in that it that keeps negative outside influences from getting in and causing trouble with my heart, with my life. And it's a restrictive fence in that it keeps **my** negative impulses from getting out and messing with other people's hearts and lives...

In this way, the LAW of God is an absolute gift, right? And, we're mostly able to follow at least the spirit of the law, if not the letter. I mean, most of us manage to make it through the day without murdering someone or stealing something...

The trouble comes when Jesus changes the rules of the LAW game. In Matthew, chapter 5, the Lord tells us that the law governs not only our outward actions...BUT, and here's the **kicker**, the Law *also* governs our **in-most thoughts!!**

Says Jesus, *You have heard that it was said...*and then he quotes a particular commandment. He goes on to say, *But I say to you...*and then he takes that commandment and pumps it full of steroids.

For example, Jesus posits this nugget about the 6th Commandment. *You have heard that it was said, You shall not commit adultery. But I say to you that whoever looks at another person with lust has already committed adultery in their heart.*

Here's my favorite (or **more** truthfully, my **least** favorite). Starting in verse 21, Jesus says, *You have heard that it was said, **You shall not murder**. But I say to you, if you say **YOU FOOL** to another person, you will be liable to the hell of fire!!!*

Here's how that commandment convicts **me**: I'm driving down the road when suddenly someone pulls out right in front of me and pokes along well under the speed limit. Guess what the first words are that form in my brain and jump right out of my mouth: **You fool!!!**

I'm a much more patient driver than I used to be...however, if God is keeping track of the number of times I've said, **You fool!** to another driver, then I'm afraid that I'll be doing some time in the hell of fire before God finally lets me in to heaven! And I don't think that I'll be alone getting toasty in those flames!!

So we're caught in a bit of a love/hate relationship with God's law. We **love** the law for all the reasons already mentioned.

But we also **hate** this holy law – because THE law, ANY law always reminds us not only that we're not perfect (and never will be!) but also that we're doomed to fail. If Jesus is right that even our thoughts of sin condemn us...then who among us can be saved?

The answer, of course, is that NO ONE can be saved...by the Law...

But the **good news** here is that the LAW is not our judge!



Nor does the LAW define us – it cannot name us or claim us – it cannot give us our identity as anything more than sinful people.

Instead, by virtue of our Lord and Savior, our spiritual integrity is not dependent on our WORKS.

If that were the case, then God could have put an end to this whole thing a long time ago, and saved heaven – and us!! – a whole lot of heartache.

All that God had to do was to forget to say anything to Noah about an ark, if you remember from my sermon a month ago, and we, like the unicorns, would not exist.

But as it turns out, the Lord had a “still more excellent” plan for us.



Because God created us and all that exists; and

Because God loved us enough to give us heaven’s holy law; and

Because Jesus willingly died to take away the sin of the world; and

Because the Holy Spirit calls and keeps us as members of Christ’s Body...

Because of all that, God has called us: *beloved children of the Lord*.

How can we be sure that this incredible gift was meant for the likes of you and me? Take a look at the guest list of those who joined Jesus at the last supper.

In the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and wine, gave thanks and said, *Take, eat and drink, this is my body and my blood, given and shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sin.*

And then he served that first holy meal: to **Judas** the betrayer, and to **Peter** the denier, and to **Thomas** the doubter, and to all the **rest** who were there. To these, his closest followers, all who would abandon him, or fail to believe that he could rise from the dead... to them – and to us – Jesus gave himself, and his name – his identity, his integrity, his forgiveness, mercy and love.

For whom is this gift of amazing grace meant? For you...and for me...and for all people – all sinners, under the law who, by grace, are counted as saints.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.