

Feb. 24, 2019
Exodus 20:1-17
First Parish UCC, Brunswick, ME
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Covenantal Living

CHILDREN'S MOMENT

Today is our last Sunday in our Moses series. Today we're going to consider what Moses is probably best known for:

The Ten Commandments.

There were lots of laws/commandments for the Jewish people; just like we have lots of laws today. These are the Top Ten. There may be several words that are unfamiliar to you.

10. No coveting
9. No bearing false witness
8. No stealing
7. No adultery
6. No murder
5. Honor father and mother
4. Remember the sabbath
3. No wrongful use of God's name
2. No idols/graven images
1. No other gods

Years ago, I asked a group of adults what they thought was the hardest commandment to live by. They said

Remember the Sabbath.

They told me they were too busy to keep sabbath time.

In our tradition, Sunday has traditionally been designated as the sabbath day. It's the day we come together in gratitude to God. Yet, the word sabbath doesn't mean

worship; it means "no work." To keep sabbath is to rest deeply. In the creation story it says that on the seventh day God rested after all the work of creating. Sabbath is the time we are to rest after all the work of the week.

Isn't it strange that one of the hardest things for people to do is to rest. Without rest we get sick. Today you might talk with your family about what helps you to rest and what helps your family to rest.

INTRO to SCRIPTURE

In the Torah – the first five books of the Bible, which have traditionally been called the books of Moses – there are 613 commandments. Today's reading lifts up the top ten. We will hear the words that Moses "downloaded from the cloud" – words that provided a covenant for the Jewish people as they were creating a community that could be sustained over time. Words for covenantal living.

SERMON

I saw a cartoon where Moses is standing on the mountain holding the tablets and the voice from the cloud says,

Now send out a mass email to all your friends, and tell them to send it to all their friends...Oh, yeah, I'm getting ahead of myself.

Moses didn't have email. He didn't have a phone. He didn't have pony express. He didn't have books or letters as we think of them. So, we imagine Moses with a couple of tablets – and not computer tablets. The words from God weren't just written in sand. They were carved in stone. They would stand the test of time. And they have. Thirty-five hundred years later they are still wise words to live by.

At the time, Moses and the people who received these words were still on the move. They were forming a new community. Sometimes things were going well and other times not so much. They needed a covenant to guide and protect their life together. It couldn't just be each person fulfilling their own dream; there had to be a commitment to the common good. Individualistic ideals will only take you so far. We also need to weave the social fabric in a healthy and constructive way.

Just like teachers in a classroom often make a covenant with their class for how they will be together. A few years ago, we did that with church school children.

Be safe.

Be responsible.

Be respectful

Sometimes it goes well and sometimes not so much.

In an earlier sermon in this series I talked about the connections between Moses and Jesus. One of the ways that Jesus' followers understood him was as the new Moses – a leader from God who would liberate the people. This is particularly emphasized in the gospel of Matthew.

Just as Moses gave us the top ten words for covenantal living, Jesus condenses it to just two. In Matthew 22:35-39

*A lawyer (from among the Pharisees) asked Jesus a question to test him,
Teacher, which commandment
in the law is the greatest?*

*Jesus responded,
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.*

From 613 down to 10 and now down to 2. Although that doesn't make it any easier in trying to fulfill them.

Jesus and Moses were both mountain men. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus goes up the mountain for the Sermon on the Mount, which contains words of wisdom about covenantal living. After the Beatitudes, Jesus speaks of several of the Ten Commandments saying,
*You have heard it said...
But I say to you....*

For example:

You have heard it said do not murder,
but I say to you consider your anger.

In each of the commandments he explores, Jesus is concerned not only about our external behavior but also about the inner state of our spirit, matters of the heart. Is our heart in the right place? With this focus, Jesus confronts any tendency toward self-righteousness.

Richard Rohr is a contemporary Franciscan friar who is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation. Here are some comments he makes about Jesus' desire to unite our inner and outer worlds. (*A Spring Within Us*)

*Whenever you perform a religious action publicly, it enhances your image as a good, moral person and has a strong social payoff. Jesus' constant emphasis is on **interior** religiosity, on purifying motivation and intention. He tells us to clean the inside of the dish instead of being so preoccupied with cleaning the outside, with looking good. (p.106)*

One simple indicator that you are struggling with motivation is if you resent or judge people who are not doing the generous or sacrificial thing that you are doing...(p.107)

The spiritual journey could be seen as a constant purification of motive until we can finally say, "I have no other reason to do anything except love of God and love of neighbor." (p.110)

Jesus distillation of all the law and prophets into two: *Love God and Love neighbor as yourself*, parallels the structure of the Ten Commandments. The first commandments are about loving God and the later ones are about loving others.

The pivotal commandment that binds the two together is *Remember the Sabbath*. We often say, *Don't just sit there, do something*. This commandment flips that wisdom around, saying, *Don't just do something, sit there*.

It must have been hard for the people even in biblical times, because it is the commandment that has the most commentary attached to it.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But 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.

You could say this was the first labor rights law.

For 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.

Who would think it would be so hard to do nothing! To rest! Many of us and so many of our young adults are in serious trouble from not resting. By not unplugging from

- The news and all its terrors
- Entertainment and all its illusions about life.
- Work and school work with its tendency to not respect our full humanity
- The abundance of wonderful opportunities before us

we are not living into the fullness of the love that God offers us.

We are called to keep sabbath time. This commandment is not a chastisement; it is an invitation. In the spiritual practice of keeping sabbath

-we love God in gratitude for the gift of life,

-We love our neighbor, including our neighbor animals, honoring their need to rest.

-We love ourselves giving ourselves the essential time and space to tune our spirits to God's spirit.

What a wonderful invitation!