

This morning we are continuing our series in The Story. In this series, we're following the main thread of Scripture and seeing how everything is connected...how God continues to pursue us and work in and through us. And as you may know, the youth (MS/HS students) are also going through the Story in their Sunday morning discipleship classes. And Paul recently shared with me that one of the youth made the comment not long ago that while he (or she? – I don't know who made this comment!)...this student had heard all of these stories of the Bible before – Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah, Tower of Babel, Moses, etc. – but had never before realized how they're all connected. And so this has been very eye-opening and faith-building. Also Patti Smith shared with me last week between services that a guy at her dad's retirement community read "The Story" and came to faith in Jesus because of it. And so I hope that this series will have a similar impact on each of us, as we grow in faith and understanding together.

This morning's passage about the Ten Commandments is set in a larger context that we're going to look at as well. In fact, most of the message is really on the stuff surrounding the 10 Commandments, though it's all connected. We did a whole series on the Ten Commandments a little over two years ago, so if you'd like that kind of depth on them, I'd encourage you to check out the sermons from the summer of 2015 in the series titled, "[God's Top Ten.](#)" Brad has put them back up on the church website, and you can access them through there.<sup>ii</sup>

So the larger context for today's passage is that the Israelites have fled Egypt, they've crossed the Red Sea, and they are now in the desert of Sinai. Moses goes up Mount Sinai to meet with God. Here's what we read about in Genesis 19: **Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured**

**possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said” (Genesis 19:3-8.)**

Hold onto this last sentence. We’ll come back to that theme. Then Moses goes up Mount Sinai again, where God comes in a dark and stormy cloud, meets him and speaks to him. (How God met/spoke to him, we really don’t know. I know perfectly sane, intelligent, clear-thinking people who “hear” God in some way, perhaps as Moses did.) This is where God speaks to him the Ten Commandments, and Moses also receives further detailed instructions about their relationship with God and with each other. But the Ten Commandments give the essence of everything that God spoke to Moses.

The Ten Commandments are God’s new directives to the people about how they are to relate to Him, and how they are to relate to one another. **The first four are about our vertical relationship with God: No other gods before him, no idols or idol worship, don’t use God’s name in unholy ways, and take a Sabbath day each week, dedicated to God.** All four of these help us in maintaining our vertical relationship with God.

The next six are rules for maintaining our horizontal relationships – our relationships with people. All people need some boundaries in these relationships, and even little kids recognize that. In fact, a Sunday school teacher was once discussing the Ten Commandments with her five- and six-year-olds. After explaining the commandment to “honor” your Father and thy Mother, she asked, “Is there a commandment that teaches us how to treat our brothers and sisters?” Without missing a beat, one little boy answered, “Thou shall not kill.”<sup>iii</sup> Pretty good answer, I guess. So: **The six that deal with our earthly relationships are: Honor your parents, don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t covet other people’s stuff or their spouse or their other family members.**

For most of us, these last six probably seem like pretty much basic building

blocks for a healthy family/community/society. It's hard to imagine they even need to be written down. But they do. And they're not about stealing the joy and the fun out of life, but instead are about giving proper boundaries so that life can be enjoyed by all.

**Jesus summarized the two groups of commandments when he said that we are to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.** But the two groups of commandments are closely connected. And when the first four are forgotten – when we forget to love God with all we've got – then the last six become more difficult to maintain. This is true on an individual basis, as well as a societal one. Regularly, with this last week's tragedy in Las Vegas being the latest example, we are reminded of how difficult it is to maintain our human relationships, when we forsake our relationship with our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. And I cannot help but believe that the answer to what ails us as a society is a return to our Christian faith...a collective return to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That's why I regularly emphasize the fact that we are missionaries right where we are...encourage us to go to Missions Fest Seattle and get equipped and inspired in that endeavor...and regularly emphasize that we're called to love our neighbors, develop community where we live, and look for opportunities to share our faith, invite people to church, and invite them to know Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Now, we oftentimes think of Moses going up on Mount Sinai, getting the Ten Commandments, then coming back down, and that was it. But he actually went up and down a few times. We've already seen two ascents up the mountain. So after getting the Ten Commandments and the more detailed aspects of them as well, Moses comes down to the people, and here's what happened: **“When Moses came to the people and related all the words and ordinances of the LORD, they all answered with one voice, “We will do everything that the LORD has told us.” Moses then wrote down all the words of the LORD and, rising early in the morning, he built at the foot of the mountain an altar and twelve sacred stones for the twelve tribes of Israel.**

**Then, having sent young men of the Israelites to offer burnt offerings**

**and sacrifice young bulls as communion offerings to the LORD, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant [what he'd written down], he read it aloud to the people, who answered, "All that the LORD has said, we will hear and do." Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words" (Exodus 24:3-8).** This is the second time they've pledged to do everything that God asked them to do – the third, actually, if you count the two here as two separate instances. And this isn't just a promise – it's a covenant with God. It's a binding agreement that had consequences if they break it.

Then Moses goes back up the mountain, with Joshua going as his assistant. 70 elders go part way with him, then he tells them to stay – which seems to be him actually sending them back to the rest of the people because the 70 aren't addressed again for quite some time – and he puts Aaron and Hur in charge of all the people while he's gone. And this time, when Moses goes up, this is when he actually receives the two stone tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them, though God had spoken the Commandments to him earlier. Moses also is given detailed instructions about building the Tabernacle, which is essentially a tent-like Sanctuary, and where God would dwell with His people, and given other instructions for worship, the priests who would lead worship, and so forth. It's all very detailed – the furniture, the dimensions, the fabric type, the colors, and so forth.

Now, this is easy to gloss over this stuff, but it's important. **In this tabernacle there was a special, sacred room, called the most holy place, (or the Holy of Holies) where the presence of God would dwell.** It would have a thick curtain that separated it from the rest of the tent. Why is God separating himself? Because of the sin in the lives of the people. God cannot come in contact with them because of his holiness and their sinfulness. So not only does God need a place to stay, but in order for God to dwell with them, God says that sin must be atoned for. In order for anyone to come into the presence of God, to have direct access to God – and only the priest would actually even do that, and only once a year – in order for that to happen, and

even for God to dwell there in his own private room, atonement must be made. More detail about this is in Leviticus, where there is a whole sacrificial system that is laid out, but it becomes instituted at this time here in Exodus. But still the end result, in terms of contact with God in the Holy of Holies, is that God remains behind the curtain, and even though atonement is made, no one comes into His presence except for the priest, once a year. Why?

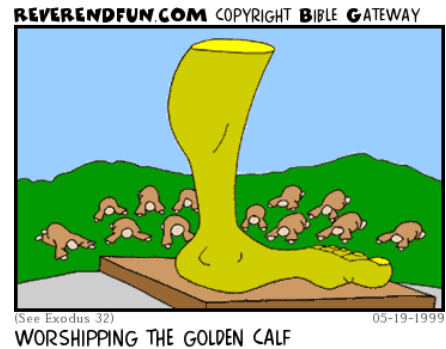
Hebrews 10:1-4, in the New Testament, gives us the answer: **The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. *It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin* (Hebrews 10:1-4, emphasis added).**

The sacrifices that the people made as atonement were really just a symbol of the once-for-all sacrifice and shedding of blood that God would himself provide, through Jesus' death on the cross. That alone is what ultimately effectively atones for sin. What God did through *their* sacrifices was to give them a way to understand the severity and problem of sin, and to give them a symbolic act of what God does in forgiving their sin.

So this time, Moses was on the mountain for 40 days getting the blueprints for the tabernacle, the worship leaders, the priests, and of course the actual stone tablets with the Ten Commandments. By the way you know what God said to Moses when he gave him the Ten Commandments on stone? “Take two tablets and call me in the morning.”<sup>iv</sup> And sure enough, the people, however, got tired of waiting for Moses, and he's calling God the next morning. The people say to Aaron (remember, he was one of two left in charge, but clearly the lead guy), **“Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him” (Genesis 32:1).** Remember, Moses had not really associated with the Israelites his whole life, even though he was one of them. So the people were a little quick to dismiss him when he goes

up the mountain for all this time. But their bigger issue is that they don't see that it is God who's made it all happen. They attribute their Exodus from Egypt to Moses, instead of God's work through him, and so they abandon Moses and they abandon God.

So Aaron collects all their gold, melts it down in a fire, fashions it **(Picture)**, into a golden calf...I couldn't resist...and says to the people, **“These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (Genesis 32:4)**. He built an altar in front of the idol, and then the next day they sacrifice a bunch of offerings to it, and then have a big old party to honor this idol. This was not only after God had brought them up out of Egypt and they'd forgotten that, but after they had said three times that they would do everything the Lord told them to do...After they made a blood covenant with God.



Well, Moses and Joshua hear the noise of the party from up on the mountain, and God says they're a bunch of stiff-necked people and he's now going to destroy them and start over again. So Moses pleads on their behalf, reminding God of the covenant he made with Abraham over 600 years ago and God relents, keeping his covenant as he always does. Moses returns to the people, breaks the tablets in anger, and asks his brother, Aaron, **“What did these people do to you, that you led them into such a great sin?” (Genesis 32:21)**. And Aaron says, “You know how prone to evil these people are. They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us.’ So I asked for their gold, they gave it to me, I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!” He says it as though he had nothing to do with it...just threw the gold in, and out popped a golden calf.

And although God did not wipe out the nation, 3,000 people died because of their idol-worship, and a plague strikes the people later as well. This idol-worship and sin stuff and the covenant that God made with them is serious.

Moses then goes back up the mountain, gets further instructions, and a new copy of the Ten Commandments. Again: 4 Vertical, 6 horizontal. And when I

think of a vertical line, and a horizontal line, and how they might come together, I can't help but think of the cross. And: **It's on the cross of Christ where the once for all atonement for sin was made.** His blood, unlike the blood of a bull or a ram or a lamb, his blood actually atones for our sins. This is the New Covenant that God makes with his people, but he supplies what's necessary to atone for our falling short. He takes care of both sides of the covenant. And do you know what happened to the holy of holies when Jesus died on the cross? Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record for us that the temple curtain (the moveable tabernacle had become the temple in Jerusalem), the curtain that divided the holy of holies where from the rest of the temple, was torn in two, from top to bottom, allowing the presence of God to come out, and go into...us. *We* now have direct access to God, and God's presence, His Spirit, even dwells in us when we cling to the cross of Christ and the blood he shed on the cross. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus fulfilled what the sacrifice of a bull or a lamb or anything else could not really fully do. But Jesus did. And so the curtain separating the presence of God from His people was no longer needed, because of the cross of Christ.

**We still need the 10 Commandments to instruct us in our vertical relationship with God and the horizontal ones with humanity.** It's not that we earn our way to God through living them out...that was never God's intention. But we still need them to put some parameters around life, so that we would live as God calls us to, so we would live, demonstrating the power of God in us: Loving Him with all we've got, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. And the only way we can do that is through the cross of Christ, that atones for the sin that separates us from God, so that the Spirit of God might burst forth from the holy of holies and dwell in us. God has always sought to dwell among His people. And with the death of Jesus, His dwelling place is, in fact, in us.

**And we need that power in the midst of our lives, because we can't live life rightly on our own – whether it's trying to live out the Ten Commandments or make atonement for sin, or some other facet of our faith, or even of life in general.** We need God's Spirit to dwell in us when we're facing cancer. We need God's spirit to dwell in us when we're facing the possibility of divorce. We need God's Spirit to dwell in us when we're

facing joblessness. We need God's Spirit to dwell in us when we're trying to be neighborly. We need God's Spirit to dwell in us when we pray, when we worship, when we serve people. We need God's Spirit to dwell in us to live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We need God's Spirit go dwell in us for our vertical relationship with him, and our horizontal relationships with others. And when we come to the cross of Christ and put our trust in Him and His atoning work on the cross that we could never do, God's Spirit does dwell in us. Thanks be to God that by His grace He's done this, and that we can respond in faith! I pray that we would all have that faith, and that God's spirit would dwell in each of us as we love Him, and love our neighbors. Let's pray...Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Today's sermon correlates to Chapter 5 in "The Story" and is influenced some by Randy Frazee's sermon (pastor at Oak Hills Church). We took orders for copies of the book, "The Story" at church, but now you can get a copy of the book on your own online through many websites (Amazon.com, cbd.com, etc.). In fact, cbd.com (Christian Book Distributors) has them for \$5, hardback. Just search for "NIV The Story Bible" at their website.

<sup>ii</sup> The link is there in the sermon, or you can click here: <http://rosehill.church/gods-top-ten>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.cybersalt.org/clean-jokes/ten-commandments>

<sup>iv</sup> As usual, I can't claim originality on this humor. Thanks, Pinterest! ☺