

Sermon on **Exodus 20:1-17** for 3rd Sunday in Lent
St. Paul's Lutheran - New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

Who He is. Who We are. How it all goes together.

You can hear the eye-roll forming in the distance. The dad is elbow deep in a project with parts and spare parts on the living room floor as the kids patiently wait for their bike or pretty princess playland to be assembled or the parts and tools lie under the utility lights in the garage with a vehicle or that new barbecue grill, and there is a pause, a sigh, a look of consternation, and a few comments of disbelief as the realization occurs that something, somehow, though certainly impossible, has been put together wrong. The question does not need to be asked, oh but it often is, “Did you follow the directions?” There is no acceptable answer to this question. No one wins. However, the directions are discovered, didn't know they even came with the project. Steps are retraced and the project is reversed and then finished correctly. Moral of the story. It's important to listen to the one who created the thing, and follow their advice on what it is, what it's for, and how it goes together correctly. God in his mercy spoke to the children of Israel whom he had just delivered out of slavery in Egypt. He shows them **who he is, who they are**, and why and how they are to live, **how it all goes together**.

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 image 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 parents 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 male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. 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 male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”*

Have you ever done any babysitting, whether it was your own family members or someone else's? Before the parents left, they always told you how they wanted their children treated – what to eat, when to go to bed, and how they wanted their children to act. There was no question as to why they got to call the shots. They are the parents. These were their kids. God starts out the ten commandments this way – *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of slavery.”* I'm not some helpless powerless idol, or some figment of your imagination, or a rouse by the devil. I am the only real God. I am the LORD, who revealed himself to you as I am, as the God of free and faithful love who does everything he says he will. I'm a jealous God in all the right ways. I brought you up out of Egypt. I rescued you. I care for you. I love you – not with a perverted permissive idea of love, but as a parent their child who loves them enough to lead them in a way that they will be respectful, godly, truly helpful people. God loved them enough to show them how to act like it to bring him glory and truly make an impact on their fellow man. That's **who He is** – our God who loves us more than anyone ever could. He created us, rescued us, and has plans for us far beyond what we could imagine. He loves us enough to let us know.

First things first – God will never settle for second place. Oh, people may try to put him in second place or out of the picture. The devil craves for us to do this, our sinful nature tries all the time, but God won't settle, so guard against this temptation. Remember **who you are**. You are someone who has the true and only God. You are loved and cared for. Remember where your blessings come from and where you come from – Him, and him alone. That gives us an amazing identity. There is a lot at stake here.

One of the first things you learn on the factory floor, or when being trained to drive big and powerful machinery like a forklift and bigger, or operate powerful machines – you get the safety protocols so that awful things do not happen to you or others. So also, God gives the warning in love to really keep him first. That means not flirting with other gods or putting him second in our hearts. In the Old Testament all the other nations

were making statues and likenesses of the sun, moon, stars, fertility symbols, animals, ancestors, you name it and calling them gods. God calls it out for what it is – an abomination that physically shows what is going on in the sinful heart. Don't do it. For us it is the idols of other people, sports, work, whatever we place in our hearts above our God and our relationships with him. Jesus said such striking words as “*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me*” (Matthew 10:37-38). Of course Jesus knew parents and children are blessings, but the shock of the statement is to help us realize that when we let good things take first place in our heart, they become idols. It's not the problem of the blessing, but how we are using it and how we are viewing it and where God is in our lives. *Jesus cleared the temple* because all the business of selling and trading for the sacrificial animals was getting in the way of true worship from the heart. God wants your heart, always. And does he deserve it?

As we listen to God gives these commands to the children of Israel in a special way on Mt. Sinai, but in the general way has them written in the hearts of all mankind, we quickly recognize that we should shake in fear like the Israelites did after hearing God's voice spell it all out. Why? Because we have failed in this first commandment and then all the other ones. We've let ourselves and our desires get between us and God's gift of contentment. WE have set God aside to do what we wanted, to feel, to lust to covet, to think, speak, act in sin. Even when we say seemingly harmless things like, “I'm bored,” or “Why can't I have those things that they have,” or “why do I have to help with this or that when others don't?” they are dangerous because they are symptomatic of a self-centeredness that places us and our desires first in our hearts, and puts God and everyone else second or worse. We should shake in fear because we foolishly have forgotten **who we are** – loved creations and redeemed creations of God. We must honor **who He is**, and listen to **how it all goes together**.

Keep him first. The commandments show how that works. We don't put anything besides him first in our hearts and lives and words and actions. We use his name to pray and praise, never to curse or lie or misrepresent him. And we put him first in our time – making sure we take time to rest our hearts in him, not as a chore or a box to check, but because he is the only one where we truly have rest now and eternally. And he is the one who teaches us how it all works, and what life is truly all about.

Jesus cleansed the temple early in his ministry because it needed it. Our hearts need it too. God is good enough to do it. Jesus always kept his father first. He used his Father's name to pray and praise and bless, even teaching us to do the same – “Our Father in heaven.” He lived to give glory to his Father in all he did, whether learning carpentry in his earthly step-father's workshop or asking questions in His Father's temple as a twelve-year-old, singing psalms in the synagogue each Sabbath as was his custom, or being content with God's plan even if others thought it was boring, or confusing, or not worth it, even if he was surrounded by friends or alone and accused by enemies. He thought it worth it because he knew **Who God is** and **who he is**, and the **only way it goes together**.

He came to show you who you truly are, who he has made you. You are blood-bought children of God. Jesus worshipped his Father perfectly in your place for all the times we've failed in self-centeredness, weakness, or lustful desire and pride and anger. Jesus gave his life on the cross perfectly following his Father's directions from the start, fulfilling all the prophecies of Scripture, proving that the price had been paid and completed with his words on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. Your forgiveness has been won. Your true identity has been revealed. You are truly a loved, forgiven and freed child of God. He earned what you and I never could. So this is **how it all goes together**.

So now live. Look at his commands and live them and love them even if the rest of the world mocks you for it, because they don't think they need His directions and plunge into more sin. Trust God and his commands and his love above all things. That's what beloved children do who know who they are and what their purpose is.

Follow the directions of your creator. Love him, and love your neighbor as yourself. Respect your parents and authority. Be respectful of your body, other people's bodies and help them. Reserve sex for marriage only, don't steal from others or cheat them or the government. Speak well of others and be patient with them. Be content with what you have. God knows what you need and want and knows how to bless. When you have Jesus you see how it all goes together. You see **who He is** and all he's done for you. You finally see **who you are** – his beloved child by his gift. You strive to follow his way because Jesus followed his directions for you and proved that's **how it all goes together**. Amen.