

SERMON: Back to Basics  
TEXT: Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

10-4-20

I want to begin with an “oldie, but goodie” that I know many of you will remember. It’s something we need to hear now more than ever.

All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten, by Robert Fulghum.

*All I really need to know about how to live and what to do and how to be I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain, but there in the sandpile at Sunday School. These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don't hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don't take things that aren't yours. Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch out for traffic, hold hands, and stick together.*

*Think what a better world it would be if all the whole world had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap. Or if all governments had a basic policy to always put things back where they*

*found them and to clean up their own mess. And it is still true, no matter how old you are. When you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.*

(Robert Fulghum, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, Villard Books, New York, 1990, page 6-7)

One good thing that has come out of this pandemic - at least early on - was that we all had an opportunity to get BACK TO BASICS, if you will. With so much closed down, we were forced to use our imaginations and learn how to entertain ourselves at home. People spent more time reading or cooking, sewing or writing, gardening or playing board games. I went for long walks and saw many people including whole families also walking or riding bicycles. Having been stripped of many of the things that keep us busy and distracted, we rearranged our priorities to match what we really value.

Sometimes it seems that the Ten Commandments have fallen pretty low in priority for even for the most devout Christians. I've had lots of people tell me about their favorite Bible verses over the years, and not once has anyone ever mentioned the Ten Commandments! So when the story from Exodus appeared in the lectionary for today, I thought it might be time for us to get back to those most basic of God's expectations for God's people.

You may remember that the commandments were written on tablets of stone and given to Moses on Mount Sinai while the Israelites wandered in the wilderness. The purpose for the commandments - according to Eugenia Gamble, the author of the 2019-2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study titled, *Love Carved in Stone* - was to instruct the Hebrew people in their transition from slavery to freedom. “They had to learn what freedom meant and what its limits were. They had to learn obedience and the consequences of thinking they knew better than God. Their *enslaved people* mentality had to be replaced with a *chosen people* mentality.... When wilderness had become... a way of life, God decided to intervene by speaking a new kind of community into being. We call this speech the Ten Commandments,” (known in the Hebrew language as the Ten Words). (Eugenia Anne Gamble, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments*, 2019-2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study)

She continues with this comment about the commandments for us. “The Ten Words are an invitation into a passionate life with God and with each other that is fundamentally different from the lives we have led heretofore. Each of the Ten Words offers a salve, a healing balm, for a core wound in the human experience. They provide boundaries within which we can live in freedom and peace.” They combine to form a love letter from God in which we hear “God’s longing for a way of life for us that will bring us harmony and joy. Moral behavior matters, not

simply because actions can anger or disappoint God, but because principled behavior is how love becomes real, both toward God and in community.” (Eugenia Anne Gamble, *Love Carved in Stone: A Fresh Look at the Ten Commandments*, 2019-2020 PW/Horizons Bible Study)

*Principled behavior is how love becomes real.* When someone asked Jesus what the greatest commandment was, he answered with two. The first was to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The second was to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus added a comment that all the laws and the teachings of the prophets are summarized in these two.

So, the Ten Commandments - and really, all of scripture - have **love** as their foundation, their nature, and their goal.

The first three deal with individuals and our relationship with God. Gamble wrote, “God invites us into loving, exclusive, freedom-giving, and respectful relationship.”

The First Word: *I am the Lord your God...; you shall have no other gods before me.* God is the only one who can fill our emptiness and loneliness. God loves us more than anyone ever could. And God wants to be our One and only.

In the Second Word, God commands, *You shall not make for yourself an idol*. We must be careful not to put our trust in anything or anyone else, whether it is our family, our work, our money, or our possessions.

The Third Word: *You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God*. This warns against, as Gamble put it, “trivializing our relationship with God.” Furthermore, she said, “The way we talk about God reveals the truth of our relationship with God.”

The Fourth Word - *Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy* - “serves as a link between our personal intimacy [with God] and our community responsibility,” Gamble noted. “It calls us, regularly and without fail, to stop and rest in the beauty and provision of God for us and for the whole human family.”

Gamble points out that the remainder of the commandments, five through ten, “focus on our life together in community.”

The Fifth Word - *Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you*. This calls us to honor that which brings life and gives fullness to life. Whether your biological parents are

worthy of respect, we would not be here without them. They are the source of our life, so we honor them for that reason.

The Sixth Word - *You shall not murder*. Don't tune out as if this doesn't apply to you. We are all guilty, as God commands us to refuse to take life or damage life in any way - whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually.

The Seventh Word - *You shall not commit adultery*, requires integrity and fidelity in all our relationships. Gamble wrote, "God's people are never to get pleasure at the expense of others... We cheapen relationships [when we act] with manipulation, abuse of power, and hurtful words."

The Eighth Word - *You shall not steal*, "reminds us not to take from others - not their possessions, their self-esteem, or their livelihood."

The Ninth Word - *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor*, "calls us to fundamental honesty in all of our dealings and in the institutions of our society." A community cannot stand without "a bedrock of truth and honesty upon which its members can depend."

The Tenth Word - *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor*, warns against greed and calls us to trust God for all that we need.

These Ten Commandments are the strategies that will help us reach the goal of loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving ourselves. These are the building blocks that make a community and hold it together.

As we come to the Lord's Table to receive the very basic elements of bread and wine, may we grow more like Christ. May we go **BACK TO BASICS** and recommit ourselves to following the Lord's commands... to the glory of God!

AMEN.