

Marks

Daily Prayer ■ Weekly Worship ■ Bible Reading
Giving Time, Talents & Resources
Spiritual Friendships ■ Service In & Beyond the Church

of Discipleship

September 6, 2020

Day 1: Exodus 20:1-4

Then God spoke all these words: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

The commands that follow are neither suggestions nor a series of rules. They are a self disclosure of God and how God shall be made real in the community. The God who forced the liberation of the Israelites is neither an abstraction nor a theoretical construct to give people hope. This God is a real presence in the community and God's presence is felt as the people of God practice these commands. 'No other gods' means that our whole life is to be organized around one single loyalty – God. When we allow our life to be split up into various other loyalties we participate in idol worship. God is the creator and all creation is under God therefore to invest any divinity with any part of creation is not only foolish but distracting from worshiping the creator.

Question: What is the difference (if any) between "Lord" and "God"?

Challenge: How would you define "idol" for someone and explain why they are dangerous?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:1-21

Day 2: Exodus 20:7

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

This command warns us about taking the Lord's name and making it mean nothing or twisting it to mean something that God is not. To take it and make it mean nothing is to claim you are a believer and then act as if God does not matter. To use it wrongfully is to threaten people using God's name or to do an act of violence in God's name.

Question: Are people having a religious experience when they say "oh my God"?

Challenge: Think back on your life and see how you have wrongfully used the name of God.

Scripture: Acts 2:16-21, Romans 10:8-13

Day 3: Exodus 20:8-10

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour 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. 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.

Six days we work for our family and community but one day we "work" (rest) for God. The challenge for us today is to interpret what it means to rest. We usually think of rest on Sabbath as praying, reading the scripture, worship and taking it easy. We could think of it as one day in seven when we rest or we could think of it as giving a 7th of our waking time for God's work. Or perhaps we could think of it as taking parts of a day as 'Sabbath time.' However we might observe the day of rest, it is as much a part of creation as the first six.

Question: What do you think it means to bless the 7th day?

Challenge: How do you practice Sabbath?

Scripture: Jeremiah 17:19-27

Day 4: Exodus 20:12

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The Hebrew word we translate as honor is *kabed*, which means "give weight to" or "take seriously." We are told to take seriously our parents and by extension all those who have gone before us. Respect is part of taking seriously but it means much more. We are told not to discount their life experiences because if we do then we will have no future. Living long on the land is a way of saying you will have a real future if you take seriously your parents. We honor them by listening to them and caring for them.

Question: Why would listening to your parents give you a longer, fuller life?

Challenge: Think of some advice your parents gave you that helped you. Think of some things you observed in your parents that have helped you. Have you taken them seriously?

Scripture: Hebrews 12:4-14

Day 5: Exodus 20:13-15

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 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.

Not murdering, stealing, lying, or having sex with someone who is not your wife are all community preserving instructions. They seem like no brainers but are often violated. We can avoid violating these if we keep in mind that what we do affects a whole group of people. Each violation brings down a community.

Question: What does it mean to covet? *Hint: it is more than just wanting something someone else has.*

Challenge: Which of these commandments has been the hardest for you to follow?

Scripture: Matthew 5:22-32, Deuteronomy 7:20-8:4

Day 6: Exodus 20:18

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, 'You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die.'

The people's response to the thunder and lighting is normal. They want someone who knows God to speak for them. Moses is there to assure them that the power of God, so displayed, is not to harm them. God will not destroy them, God only wants to find out if their faith is serious. The people trust Moses and his words but still do not want to come into the direct presence of God. Today Christians come into the presence of God through Jesus Christ. It is through His death and Resurrection that we can stand before the powerful God without fear.

Question: Why would the people die if God spoke to them?

Challenge: When people ask for God to speak to them do you think they mean it? Would you like God to speak to you?

Scripture: Exodus 19:9-25

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September 13, 2020

Day 1: I Corinthians 10:1-2

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea,

The use of images from the Hebrew Bible shows that the Corinthian community accepted that the God of Israel is the same God who is the Father of Jesus. Using the current (in Paul's day) term baptism, Paul equates the ancient Israelites with the Corinthians. All went under the sea and were baptized into Moses. By passing through the sea they joined Moses. If going through the sea (being baptized) did not by itself prevent them from falling into Idolatry so too will your baptism not prevent you from falling into Idolatry. Paul understands that baptism is entry into the family of God but warns that it is not magic.

Question: What do you think Paul means by under a cloud?

Challenge: Thinking of the account of the Red Sea crossing, write down what baptism means.

Scripture: Exodus 13:17-22, 14:19-20, Psalms 105:37-45

Day 2: I Corinthians 10:3-5

and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

Paul then goes on to challenge their understanding of the benefits of the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians somehow believed that by just taking it they were immune to practices that were un-Christ like. Paul tells them not to be arrogant because the Israelites also ate divine food (manna), yet they had to spend a generation in the wilderness instead of being in the Promised Land, because they tempted God by not following His directions to go into the land.

Question: What made the manna spiritual food?

Challenge: Think of two or three activities God may not be pleased with today.

Scripture: Numbers 20:2-13, Exodus 17:1-7

Day 3: I Corinthians 10:6-8

Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day.

Paul now gives two examples of how the privileged Israelites lusted after evil things. First, Idolatry - worshipping the creature, not the creator. This was exemplified by the Corinthians going to the pagan Temples to eat meat offered to idols. It was the eating in honor of the deity but more so activities that might follow the meal. Paul believes that even if one does not mean to worship at these meals, one can be tempted (because of participation in the meal) to begin to act as if the idols are real. Second, Sexual immorality - Paul probably meant this in connection with a post feast activity but he would also mean sexual intimacy outside of the marriage covenant. How we use our bodies does have an effect on our beliefs.

Question: What event in the Old Testament does Paul refer to in verse 6?

Challenge: Come up with a few examples of how we might be lead astray.

Scripture: I Corinthians 8, Exodus 23:1-6

Day 4: I Corinthians 10:9-10

We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.

The third example is testing God by intentionally seeing if God will be faithful even when we fall short in following God's commands. The fourth is grumbling against God's chosen leaders. In the account of the wilderness travels God answers the "cry" of Israel with help. God answers the complaint of Israel with punishment. This business of complaining is very serious. A cry is asking for help and a willingness to accept that help. Grumbling and complaining is telling God the help is not good enough. God chose Moses to lead the people, not to take care of all their hurts and wants. It is not the job of those in leadership in the church to make life better for the members.

Question: Do we have the right to demand from God? Do we have the right to demand from our parents? Do we have the right to demand from our government?

Challenge: Think this week about when you are complaining or are about to. Reflect on why you are complaining.

Scripture: Number 21:4-9, John 3:14-15

Day 5: I Corinthians 10:11

These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that they stand at the end of the ages where the promises of God can now be seen by all. God has brought all the past promises into focus and fulfillment in Christ. They and we are to be warned not to act like those before who were given the promise.

Question: If Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises how do we become part of Christ?

Challenge: How can we understand today that we are in the beginning of the new age when evil seems to be all around us?

Scripture: John 3

Day 6: I Corinthians 10:12-13

So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

Paul ends his warning with a word of hope. He does not want the listeners to become worried about their ability to withstand evil. Paul is assuring the Corinthians (and us today) that in the ordinary human trials one can expect divine aid. It is deliberate acts based on false security that put God to the test. Jesus did not test God by throwing himself off the Temple wall to see if God would rescue Him. Stay away Paul says, from situations that will tempt you and test God's goodness.

Question: What are ordinary human trials?

Challenge: Think of a time when a problem itself provided a solution.

Scripture: Romans 8

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September 20, 2020

Day 1: Philippians 4.1-3

1Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. 2 I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. Paul's letter shows his great affection for the congregation at Philippi. He knows and has experienced the congregations' ability to care for each other. He urges them to stand firm in that caring by helping Euodia & Syntyche two of the leaders of the believers at Philippi. In addition to not let anything come in the way of their care for each other.

Question: What kind of help do you think Paul has in mind for the two women?

Challenge: Think back to a time when you had to mediate between two persons. How did you do it?

Scripture: Matthew 12.13-23

Day 2 Philippians 4.4-5

4 rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Demonstrate how happy you are that Jesus is your Lord. The one you call lord is benevolent. This means that this lord will give and not take from your life. This lord will not be at ease while you toil. This lord will not say "so what" when you suffer. This Lord will give you eternal life now and forever. Because Jesus is our Lord then we can be kind and gentle to everyone because our Lord is always near to encourage us.

Question: Is the phrase "the Lord is near" use to encourage the Philippians? If so how?

Challenge: How can a person in a practical way follow Paul's request that we rejoice in the Lord always?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 16.6-16

Day 3 Philippians 4

6Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. Paul tells us not to be anxious about things that might happen to us that are unpleasant. We are not to spend our lives trying to avoid problems and risky events. We need to be careful but we cannot walk around on eggshells. Life has with it the chance of pain but it also has great possibilities for enjoyment. Paul is not saying that we can pray and our troubles will go away however by letting our request be known to God we can then listen to how God will help us.

Question: What is supplication?

Challenge: List a few things that you worry about. Make an effort to each day pray that God will help you overcome that worry.

Scripture: 1 Timothy 1.16-2.6

Day 4: Philippians 4.7

7And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus The peace of God is a state of mental calm and serenity. This peace will guard our whole being from the power of evil and death. Though we will die someday and pain is a part of living. Pain and death's real power comes from the fear they cause. Peace from God is a state of mind that allows God's assurance to fill us with calm. Real peace is knowing that God will be with us, even in our pain or death.

Question: How does being a Christian protect us from the fear of death?

Challenge: Think back on your life to two or three times where God given you assurance of God's presence in your life.

Scripture: Ezekiel 37.1-28

Day 5: Philippians 4.8

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Paul is saying that there is something more important than the list above (honorable, just, pure, pleasing, commendable, worthy of praise) that is the peace of God. The life we have in Christ is more fulfilling than anything else in all creation. Events will come and go. People will be born and die. Life will go on with or without us. Change will surely come but our God is forever. God created us and by His creation has obligated Himself to care for us.

Question: When he says "think about these things" does he mean the list before in the verse or something else in the passage?

Challenge: Think about your biggest worry then ask God to help you to deal with that worry and not allow it to derail your life.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13

Day 6: Philippians 4

9Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. As we match our beliefs with our behavior and demonstrate the values our Lord taught we develop a greater faith and this greater faith assures us of God' love. It is because we do not act like redeemed people that we come to doubt the God is and is the creator of the entire world and that this creator will redeem all creation.

Question: What do you think is the things people fear about death?

Challenge: What things do people see in you that are examples of your life changes by Jesus?

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September 27, 2020

Day 1: Deuteronomy 32:1

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; let the earth hear the words of my mouth.

Moses is giving the people a word of history, warning and hope before they embark on the last part of their journey and cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land. These final instructions and warnings were to prepare the people before they went on to the next stage in God's plan of redemption. The people who went through the wilderness were forged into a nation that would show (by the way they lived with each other and how they treated each other) God to the world. They were to be a light to the Gentiles. They were not to consider themselves better than the Gentiles. In humility they were called to perform a task in God's plan. In order to perform that task they needed a stable environment where they could live and worship and show to the world the power and majesty of God.

Question: Would you use history to give someone a word of hope?

Challenge: What do you think it means that Moses wants the heavens and earth to listen to him?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:1-27

Day 2: Deuteronomy 32:2

May my teaching drop like the rain, my speech condense like the dew; like gentle rain on grass, like showers on new growth.

Water is a primary symbol of life and death. Without it we would perish and too much of it will drown us (Genesis 6:17-22). Teaching is for the growth of the student, not the profit of the teacher. Like dew in the morning that forms almost by magic the teacher's prayer is that their words will combine with the student's experience to form knowledge. Think of reading - how did you learn to read? How did you learn to add or any of the other basics? It is amazing that a process of instruction combined with the student's mind comes out as reading. Teaching is not only instruction but encouragement. Instruction and encouragement brings about growth.

Question: Can you name three other "primary" symbols?

Challenge: Think back on the "teachers" you have had - which do you recall the most and why?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:28-43

Day 3: Deuteronomy 32:3

For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God!

God has led the people in the wilderness faithfully for forty years. Moses reminds them of that time and of the time before they began the journey. Before any of them could say the name of God, God was aware of them and cared for them. When we baptize a baby today we demonstrate to the world that we believe in a God that loves us even when we can do nothing in return. Before we even know that God is real, God is present in our life and sustaining us.

Question: Do you think there was special power connected to the very name of God? Do you think that power still exists?

Challenge: Do you have an opinion on adult vs. infant baptism? Is one more effective than the other? Or more real than the other?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 32:44-52

Day 4: Deuteronomy 32:4

The Rock, his work is perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God, without deceit, just and upright is he;

Moses reminds the people that God is faithful. God has kept His promises in both blessing and judgment. The corrections that God did to the people during the wilderness were not to punish in the sense we use it today. God was preparing the people for the future. They would not believe God's words of hope and keep going if God was not consistent in correcting them when they failed to be faithful.

Question: What is the key component of a concept of justice?

Challenge: Think of an example of God blessing you. Keep that event or experience in mind so that when you are in some kind of trouble this week it will come to mind.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 33:1-29

Day 5: Deuteronomy 32:7

Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you.

Moses tells them how they can recall and pass on to the next generation what they had experienced in the wilderness. They must listen to their elders. The elders (because they cannot work all day anymore) are the ones that can reflect on how God has been with them and interpret for the next generation the meaning to God's actions in the present.

Question: How do you learn history the best - facts or stories? Why?

Challenge: Make a short list of who you consider your elders. These are people you look to for wise counsel.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Day 6: Deuteronomy 5:16

Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The term "honor" means to give weight to or to take seriously. We are instructed to take seriously the life of our parents. We do this by receiving and using what they pass on to us. They must tell us (and we must listen) about God and creation and redemption. They must tell us how to practically survive in this world. We need to hear their advice so that as we grow older we might not be afraid of the future.

Question: How do you take seriously your Father?

Challenge: Name three pieces of practical advice on living you received from your parents. What have you passed on to the next generation?

Scripture: Deuteronomy 5:6-21