

**Sermon**

**“Radical Gospel”**

August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019 ~ First Presbyterian Church

9<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Based on Exodus 20:1-17 and Luke 10:25-37

**SCRIPTURE:**

**Exodus 20:1-17**

<sup>1</sup> Then God spoke all these words: <sup>2</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. <sup>13</sup> You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup> You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. <sup>17</sup> 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. [NRSV]

**Luke 10:25-37**

<sup>25</sup> Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” <sup>26</sup> He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” <sup>27</sup> He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” <sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” <sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." [NRSV]

**OPENING PRAYER:** Holy God, this is the time when we quiet our hearts and our minds, to pay attention—to *really* pay attention—to what you have to say to us today. Continue to fill us with your living Word, and give us understanding by your Holy Spirit, that having heard your Word, we may live lives that fulfill your will and your purpose. In Jesus' name we pray; and let all God's people say...Amen.

### The Ten Commandments

*Radical*—defined as relating to or affecting the fundamental nature of something in ways that are far-reaching or thorough; also characterized by the departure from tradition in ways that are innovative relative to such tradition.

Something very radical occurred over 3,000 years ago—something very far-reaching and thorough and innovative—a departure from the accepted traditions, beliefs, and practices of multiple ancient Near Eastern cultures such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, and more; something that affected the fundamental nature of not only that part of the world in that particular time, but it changed the course of history. Our Lord and our God began to speak to, and interact with, and move in and through *people*—an absolute radical departure from religious norms of its time, when worship and devotion was practiced to a variety of gods and deities, and such beings never had reciprocal contact or relationship with human beings.

And, our scriptures tell the story of all of it. Up to that point in history, adoration and devotion to particular deities was made by people as necessary and for the primary purpose of soliciting their favor and avoiding their supposed wrath. But, scripture tells us of our God—*the one* God—speaking to Noah before and after the flood, and making a covenant with Noah and his descendants. And, then we have the stories of Abram—a man who followed God's radical instructions to leave his homeland, his family, and his father's household for an unknown distant land—a

radical departure from the accepted tradition and practice of his culture where multiple generations of the same family stayed together. But, he did as God told him. He traveled with his family, hundreds and thousands of miles over many years, enduring the ups and downs of life as a stranger in strange lands and with people not of his own. But, he did as God told him. Abram was faithful to God, and God was faithful to Abram, guiding and directing Abram, watching over him and his family. God also made a covenant with Abram and his descendants, and marked the occasion with a name change. Abram became Abraham, which literally means “ancestor of a multitude.” God promised Abraham to be the ancestor of many nations and kings, and God promised Abraham and his descendants the whole land known as Canaan, and that he would be their God forever. And, time went on. The descendants of Abraham, God’s people, also endured the ups and downs of life as strangers in strange lands and with people not of their own, moving ultimately from the land of Canaan to the land of Egypt where they found relief from famine. There, God remained faithful to his people, moving in and through the life of Joseph to protect his family and save the lives of God’s people in Egypt.

But, time would turn the tide against God’s people, and eventually a pharaoh came to power in Egypt who oppressed them. At this point in scripture we meet Moses, the Hebrew child raised in the house of pharaoh, conflicted by his Egyptian life of privilege while knowing the pain of his people of origin. Moses murdered an Egyptian guard and fled Egypt to save his life, where he ultimately found himself living in the land of Midian. As with his ancestors before him, our Lord and our God spoke to Moses, sending him back to Egypt to free God’s people from oppression. And, so Moses returned to Egypt, acting on God’s behalf to rescue God’s people, and he led them out of Egypt, where scripture tells us that after three months’ time they arrived at Mount Sinai.

Then something *really* radical occurred—as I said earlier, something far-reaching and innovative that thoroughly altered all previous traditions and practices, and changed the course of history again. Because at Sinai, something happened that is unique in the history of humankind—for it was at Sinai that the foundation of faith in a single God was laid—a faith strong enough to ultimately conquer the globe. Moses, a man raised in a culture that worshipped a variety of deities and gods in a variety of shapes and sizes, came down from Sinai proclaiming faith in one God alone.

He came down from Sinai with the very Word of God, with what we call the Ten Commandments—a radical departure from previous traditions that fundamentally proclaimed, in writing, the redemptive moral purpose of one single God having a reciprocal loving relationship with human beings. Indeed, the Ten Commandments provide us with a framework for being God’s people. As a set of “laws” or commandments, they are the first ten of 613 total commandments in the Hebrew Torah. But, they are far more than a top 10 list of rules and regulations, or a ranking of God’s top 10 list of concerns. Instead, they truly are a framework for how we live our lives as God’s people because how we live is of deep importance to God. They are our framework, our foundation, for our relationships—with God and with each other. The first four commandments address our relationship with God:

1. You must have no other gods besides me
2. Do not make an idol for yourself and do not bow to them or worship them
3. Do not use God’s name as if it were of no significance
4. Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy—six days you may work but the seventh day is for rest and devotion to God

And, the other six commandments address our relationship with each other—things that are common sense today, but were apparently not a long time ago:

5. Honor your parents (father and mother)
6. Do not murder (or hurt anyone)
7. Do not commit adultery
8. Do not steal
9. Do not lie (testify falsely against your neighbor)
10. Do not desire anything that is not yours (that belongs to your neighbor)

These commandments act as a mirror for our lives, showing us the reflection of our actions and where we have fallen short in our relationships. They also protect us, giving us limits to function within our health and safety with each other. And, they guide us by helping us understand how we should live as God’s people.

Once upon a time, they were radical new ways of understanding God, and they literally and proverbially set in stone the ways of God’s covenant with his people. They pointed the way forward for God’s people to live in relationship with God and with each other for generations. Yet, God’s people continued to rebel and neglect God’s covenant. What was once radical became ordinary, and the framework for

relationship with God and with each other became broken, discarded, or ignored. Something else *more radical* needed to happen ...

### **Jesus the Christ**

*Gospel*—defined generally as a set of principles or beliefs that is absolutely true, but defined specifically for Christ-followers as the life and teaching of God’s truth as revealed in Jesus the Christ. The word’s origin comes from the Old English word *godspel*, meaning literally a good news story. And, I’d say that the life and teaching of God’s truth in Jesus Christ qualifies as a good news story—a radical good news story!

Because, like I said, something else more radical than the Ten Commandments needed to happen. And, once again something very radical occurred—something very far-reaching and thorough and innovative—a departure from the accepted traditions, beliefs, and practices of the Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, that affected the fundamental nature of not only that part of the world in that particular time, but it changed the course of history again.

Our Lord and our God no longer limited God-self to speaking to and with humans, or revealing God’s wishes through stone tablets or proclamations from prophets—God physically came among us in the person, Jesus! This was an absolute radical departure from religious norms of its time, when worship and devotion was still practiced to a variety of deities in Greco-Roman culture, and Jewish worship had become almost exclusively based on temple sacrifice. Instead, God radically acted in history when “the Word became flesh and made his home among us” (John 1:14). If nothing else, we know from Scripture that Jesus’ life was radical in the face of his contemporaries, and his teaching was radical in the face of all that his people of origin understood about God. And so, from the life and the teaching of Jesus, we have the *gospel*—God’s radical good news.

As Presbyterian-flavored Christians, we understand that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sin, and we believe that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). So when Jesus was tested on the law, as we read in today’s gospel story from Luke, what do we find? What do we find to be Jesus’ answer to the question, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” Or, another way of asking it, “Jesus, what must I do to know God the way *you* know God?”

And, instead of a numbered list, we find God in the flesh, Jesus the Christ,

radically summarizing and re-stating our understanding of our relationship with God and with each other in one sentence—to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). *There* is the essence of the Ten Commandments in one sentence. This concept was not original to Jesus—it comes from the combination of Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in the Jewish Torah. It was, and is, an important part of Jewish life, but it was radical for Jesus to use it in this way to summarize God’s commands. In doing so, Jesus radically set down a new foundation for our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. In doing so, Jesus radically signified God’s sovereignty over every part of our lives—that God’s claim on us through grace reaches to every area of our experience:

- ✦ Heart—our innermost being and all our passion
- ✦ Soul—our very essence and our identity
- ✦ Strength/might—our energy, resolve, and resources
- ✦ Mind—our understanding and intellectual capacities

The Ten Commandments and all the other 603 commandments in the Torah had become all too much of a behavioral proof of faith (for many they still are!)—too much focus on the list itself and on the ranking of rules and regulations, and not enough focus on the truth and essence of God’s love fulfilled, and grace made possible, because of Jesus.

So ... what must we do to inherit eternal life? Or, another way of asking it, what must we do to know God the way Jesus knew God? Well, we must love the Lord our God with *all* our heart, with *all* our soul, with *all* our strength, and with *all* our mind, and love our neighbor as *ourselves*—we must do *this*, and we must hold nothing back! This teaching from Jesus is far-reaching and thorough and innovative, and, yes, it may even be a departure from the accepted traditions, beliefs, and practices of our own current culture. But, that’s the fundamental nature of God’s *radical gospel*—that’s the fundamental nature of God’s radical good news story!

And, thanks be to God for it! Amen.