

The Ten Commandments
Exodus 20: 1-17
October 20, 2019 – First Congregational Church of Meredith, NH
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This week a member of the church (who shall remain nameless) said to me, "I really love your stories," and he mentioned several things about how the story I told last week wound its way through the sermon. And I said, "Well, sometimes the stories come to me, and sometimes they don't. In fact, this week, I don't know if a story is bubbling up. I may just have to teach." And he said, "Teach! Oh, no! Don't do that!"

I think that was God speaking through him to me. And so, this week, no teaching. No explaining. No stories except the Bible story itself. I'm just going to tell the story of the Ten Commandments, using a modern language version, and then let us all ponder in silence for a moment the raw, wild word of God in all its power, and what it might mean to come face to face with God. If you want to talk with me later about what you hear today, I will be glad to sit with you and do that. Listen now for the word of God.

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Three months after leaving Egypt the Israelites entered the Wilderness of Sinai, and set up camp. Israel camped there facing the mountain.

As Moses went up to meet God, God called down to him from the mountain: "Speak to the House of Jacob, tell the People of Israel: 'You have

seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to me. If you will listen obediently to what I say and keep my covenant, out of all peoples you'll be my special treasure. The whole Earth is mine to choose from, but you're special: a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.' This is what I want you to tell the People of Israel."

Moses came back and called the elders of Israel together and set before them all these words which GOD had commanded him. The people were unanimous in their response: "Everything GOD says, we will do." Moses took the people's answer back to GOD.

GOD said to Moses, "Get ready. I'm about to come to you in a thick cloud so that the people can listen in and trust you completely when I speak with you." Again, Moses reported the people's answer to GOD.

GOD said to Moses, "Go to the people. For the next two days get these people ready to meet the Holy GOD. Have them scrub their clothes so that on the third day they'll be fully prepared, because on the third day I will come down on Mount Sinai and make my presence known to all the people. Post boundaries for the people all around, telling them, 'Warning! Don't climb the mountain. Don't even touch its edge. Whoever touches the mountain dies—a certain death. And no one is to touch that person, he's to be stoned. That's right—stoned. Or shot with arrows, shot to death. Animal or man, whichever—put to death – for touching the mountain.'

“A long blast from the horn will signal that it’s safe to climb the mountain.”

Moses went down the mountain to the people and prepared them for the holy meeting. They gave their clothes a good scrubbing. Then he addressed the people: “Be ready in three days. No sex between now and then.”

On the third day at daybreak, there were loud claps of thunder, flashes of lightning, a thick cloud covering the mountain, and an ear-piercing trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp shuddered in fear. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet God. They stood at attention at the base of the mountain.

Mount Sinai was all smoke because GOD had come down on it as fire. Smoke poured from it like smoke from a furnace. The whole mountain shuddered in huge spasms. The trumpet blasts grew louder and louder. Moses spoke and God answered in thunder. GOD descended to the peak of Mount Sinai. GOD called Moses up to the peak and Moses climbed up.

GOD said to Moses, “Go down. Warn the people not to break through the barricades to get a look at GOD lest many of them die. And the priests also, warn them to prepare themselves for the holy meeting, lest I break out against them.”

Moses said to GOD, "But the people can't climb Mount Sinai. You've already warned us well telling us: 'Post boundaries around the mountain. Respect the holy mountain.'"

GOD told him, "Go down and then bring your brother Aaron back up with you. But make sure that the priests and the people don't break through and come up to GOD, lest I break out against them."

So, Moses went down to the people. He said to them, "GOD spoke all these words:

I am GOD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of a life of slavery. No other gods, only me.

No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them and don't serve them because *I* am GOD, your God, and I'm a most jealous God, punishing the children for any sins their parents pass on to them to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation of those who hate me. But I'm unswervingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

No using the name of GOD, your God, in curses or silly banter; God won't put up with the irreverent use of God's name.

Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Work six days and do everything you need to do. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to GOD, your

God. Don't do any work—not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servant, nor your maid, nor your animals, not even the foreign guest visiting in your town. For in six days GOD made Heaven, Earth, and sea, and everything in them; God rested on the seventh day. Therefore, GOD blessed the Sabbath day; God set it apart as a holy day.

Honor your father and mother so that you'll live a long time in the land that God, your God, is giving you.

No murder.

No adultery.

No stealing.

No lies about your neighbor.

No lusting after your neighbor's house—or wife or servant or maid or ox or donkey. Don't set your heart on anything that is your neighbor's.

And all the people, experiencing the thunder and lightning, the trumpet blast and the smoking mountain, were afraid—they pulled back and stood at a distance. They said to Moses, "You speak to us and we'll listen, but don't have God speak to us or we'll die."

Sometimes God comes to us as a gentle shepherd, sometimes as the pure spirit of Love, and sometimes God gets our attention as a searing, holy fire. May we always be ready to receive God, no matter how God chooses to come to us. Amen