

TEXT: Exodus 20:1-20

TOPIC: The Decalogue is shared with the Hebrews, who become afraid as God's presence tests them.

SUBJECT: The Journey with Law provides a framework for living and relying on grace.

TITLE: The Journey with Law

I've never liked taking tests. It doesn't matter if it is a true-false test, a multiple guess test, a short answer test, a combination of the three or an essay test. I've never liked tests.

When I was in seminary, I even remember one time when one of my professors had us take a test and a classmate jokingly told the professor that test-taking is not theologically appropriate, so we shouldn't be required to take the test.

The professor's response was perfect. Tests may be theologically inappropriate but as your professor, God is on my side, so I'm pretty sure I'm within my rights to have you take this test.

That got a good laugh.

It wasn't until I was in seminary, however, that I started to figure out how to prepare for tests. Since then, I've learned tests represent any challenge as we journey with the law. Apparently, part of taking tests requires something we don't always connect with the Ten Commandments or the Torah. Hopefully today we can make some of those connections.

PRAYER

I think a key to understanding the Ten Commandments is to know both what they are and what they're not. One word in verse 20 suggests the reason the commandments matter. Every journey is a test God gives us; it's like the Spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness. Tests offer us correction points, and tests reveal where in our lives we need grace.

When I think about this, I think of several examples in my own life. It's taken me a lifetime to forgive myself for stuff I did when I was in my late teens and 20s. Some of the things

I did and didn't do ended up on endless replay for years. The problem I seemed to have was that I wasn't getting the lesson my journey with the law was giving me.

For instance, when I was in seminary, one of my final classes was entitled, "Christian Ministry in a Violent World." When I took it, I researched why some translations use the word murder and others use the word kill in Exodus 20:13. Without sidetracking from the point, I came to believe that *thou shall not kill* is the better word choice because killing has broader implications for taking life than just murder. Killing happens when capitalism demands over-production of fad merchandise, which often comes at the expense of water supplies, land health, and clean air in the pursuit of wealth. Killing can be also be paying an executive a multi-million-dollar salary while thousands of children die daily from starvation.

Get the point?

The same principle applies to every commandment; every commandment is expansive. When people make use of a surface understanding of the Decalogue, it often reinforces hardships and normalizes dysfunction. When people understand the commandments expansively rather than a surface fashion, God gives people a framework to truly live life, so God's light in all people can shine brighter. This makes it possible for people for people to live out their own hero's journey, whether as individuals or in community. Given who the law was presented to the Hebrew people at Siani – the law should always support liberating rather than oppressing, and, I think, more importantly reinforcing humanity's need for grace.

Because all of humankind stands in the need of grace, anyone who thinks they can fulfill the Ten Commandments is fooling themselves. It is impossible to keep the Ten Commandments; I think God made it impossible so we would let our need for grace be the

driving force in our lives and our faith. I think it's also why Jesus spoke about the commandments in his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5. And what he says in the sermon on the mount is expressed when Jesus protests the exploitation of people in the temple and overturns the money-changers tables. We are tested every time we see others being harmed by the oppression of the few. We are tested anytime we let oppression rob people of the freedom of letting light and life radiate in the world.

It's why the journey with the law matters.

When God gave the Hebrew people the Decalogue, God already knew it would be impossible for people to keep all the commandments, so that as the Hebrew people realized this, they realized they needed something else so their journey with the law would see them through their tests. Like us, they needed grace, too.

There isn't anyone I've ever known who didn't need God's grace to help them move beyond their Egypt; my Egypt was being stuck for years guilted and shamed myself for choices I made apart from God in my youth and then fretting over them but fretting over them won't change them and I had to discover that; maybe you do, too. That's the past, and the past is dead. The point is, it takes years to move past what we let enslave us; our journey with the law is a hero's journey with God, so we may understand not only who we are but why we are here, and what God wants to do with our lives.

After all, the Ten Commandments give a framework to people to shape their lives that is impossible to keep but it doesn't mean we shouldn't try, and while we give it our best, relentlessly pursue grace so that what we can't do, we trust that God can.

Just as God gave the Hebrews a sense of identity and character before God, God does the same for us because grace provides people with ethics that give framework for the law. Grace makes it possible for us to see how our actions affect others and how human actions affect the light and life God waits to see shine in all of creation and in all of God's children.

Journeying with the law is part of the process God uses to let you find your way and to let you discover that you are a hero – you are a hero to God.

None of us keeps the Decalogue. None of us. So, God provides grace. All God asks of us is that we constantly and relentlessly pursue grace the God intends for us.

As God's children, as those created in God's image and belonging to God, there is only task God gives us. One task. That we be as devoted to God as God is to us. The closer we get to that ideal, the better. Grace takes us closer to that ideal. Our journey with the law helps us discover our hero within, which translates to love, compassion, understanding, kindness and mercy that God would want us to have toward every relationship with ever living entity around us.

So maybe taking a test isn't all that bad. Especially a test guided by Ten Words with expansive potential, but especially a test that reminds us of the grace God waits to give us.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.