

Sunday, June 6, 2021 – The Ten Words Sermon Series I
“I Am the Lord Your God”

Exodus 20: 1-2

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Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

1 And God spoke all these words, saying, 2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Have you ever tried to jump into the middle of a story and have no idea what’s going on? My nephew is a big fan of all the Marvel movies and related TV shows, like Wanda Vision. I know this will sound horrendous to some of you but I really don’t get into the comic book movies most of the time. I get bored and start checking my phone. While part of it is that I really, truly believe it’s just not my thing, another part of it is that I didn’t start at the beginning. When you don’t know the context, when the backstory isn’t revealed at the appropriate time to get the next piece of information there’s stuff that flies by you that you’re sure means **something** but you don’t know exactly what it means. In fact, you may even completely miss the point.

I’m convinced that missing the point happens far too often around one of the most critical aspects of our faith. We hear the term “The Ten Commandments” and our brains immediately categorize it as “the rulebook.” We think of what we’re not supposed to do. If one of the commandments feels burdensome, we may also huff and puff or role our eyes a bit, chaffing against it. In the worst case scenario we may just decide we’re not going to live by a bunch of rules.

When you pluck the commandments out of their context, that’s easy to do. So let’s look at the context. There’s a 600 year long history of relationship between God and the family of Abraham. He promises Abraham, Isaac and Jacob things like descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. A king will come from their line, who will rule forever. They don’t live to see those promises realized. And either do the many generations to follow, as the “family tree” of this one family grows and grows until they are a small nation of millions, held in slavery by the Egyptians. And for all the pain and indignity of this captivity God was indeed building up the size of the descendants of Abraham. And then He rescued them. He sent one of the descendants, Moses, to share signs and wonders from God, culminating in ever more consequential plagues until Pharaoh loosens his grip and lets the people leave their slavery in Egypt. And now, safely on the other side of the Red Sea, Pharaoh’s army destroyed by waters, fed and

nourished through food and water that God supplies through extraordinary, supernatural means the people are camped around a mountain called Sinai and Moses is up the mountain, conversing directly with God, who has a message for the people. And that message begins with the words in our text today: "And God spoke all these words saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

Notice something critical – Israel hasn't really done something, or merited anything to get this mercy from God – to protect them or save them. He simply chose them, because He's God and He wanted to love them. They haven't been especially grateful, already complaining about the lack of food variety to sustain them *in a desert*. And He knows some of the future unfaithfulness... happening right after Moses hands all these words down to the people, who upon descending again from Sinai with God will find the people have gathered up all their precious metals and melted down the gold to create an idol of a calf to worship. They've done nothing to deserve this help – the old timey word is "deliverance." They've certainly done plenty to have their just desserts be quite the opposite of help. And yet God's leading word is one of love. One of deliverance. In our modern day lingo, we would call it salvation. He saved them from slavery in Egypt and made them His people, despite their meeting no qualifications and in fact their not meeting qualifications.

That is to say this – everything that follows the "I am the Lord your God" who saved you stuff comes in the context of love. It's relationship. It's choosing, faithfulness, commitment, long-suffering kind of stuff.

The Hebrew numbering system for the "commandments" as we call them lists the "I am the Lord your God" who saved you piece as the first. And since it's not really a "commandment" as such, more a declaration and statement that forms the whole relationship, in Hebrew they're called the "devarim," the "words." And I like that – in fact, it's probably better than our numbering. It's not just an introduction. The first Word is one of love and grace to those who don't deserve it. Before a single "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" comes out of God's mouth He acts in love and bases everything that He's about to say on the relationship that He has already committed to. The basis of these "words" is love!

And that changes everything that follows, doesn't it? He's not the cop with the speed gun on the side of the road ready to write you up. It's more like he's the loving parent who doesn't want to see you

get hurt. When we're kids we don't always get this growing up but our parents know – the rules aren't there to stop your fun. The rules are there because we love you and we don't want to see you hurt yourself. If your toddler is loose and running toward the street you'll let out a loud, "No! (insert kid's name), stop!" And frankly, while your goal isn't to make the kid cry it is most definitely to get their attention and make them stop! They're going to hurt themselves! And the child may very well be angry with you. You scared them. You wouldn't let them do what they wanted. You ruined their fun. You're mean. But better that they're angry at you for being mean and ruining their fun than letting them play in the street, right?

That's what the words to follow in this series are. They're predicated on this loving, fatherly relationship that makes the people of Israel His children – and makes you and me His children through our Brother Jesus in our baptisms. The commandments aren't to ruin your fun. The foundation is love and relationship, a protective, diligent Father who not only doesn't want to see His children hurt themselves but also wants the most joy-filled life possible for us as the people He has saved to live and work in His kingdom.

And then the Father showed His commitment in full. Israel wasn't able to follow these commands. So the promised descendant from the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob came. He walked through Israel's history and did everything right that they did not. And then the Father committed so heavily in His love for Israel, and everyone who would be brought into His people through Jesus, that He allowed He had His Son step in and do for you and me what Moses' instructions about the Passover Lamb did for ancient Israel. They sacrificed the very best of what they had and God set them free, delivered them from literal slavery in Egypt. Celebrating that same meal 1,400 years after, Jesus rewrote the agreement. No longer are you sacrificing this lamb – I'm sacrificing myself. And Jesus does just that – He follows His Father's will to suffer the fully deserved punishment that we all should have for not following all of these words that lay out what life as one of God's children is. He let us own son take the blame, the shame and the suffering and He lets us take the credit for everything that Jesus did right.

He is the Lord our God, who brought us out of slavery to sin, death and the devil. Who forgives us day by day and gives us His Holy Spirit to strive after living the way He instructs as His perfect will for how the world is supposed to work, shown in these 10 Words. It is in relationship, and in His Son Jesus

that these words morph from a dusty, musty list of do's and don'ts into a vibrant life, full of love for God and for each other. May God bless us to that end today and throughout our contemplation on these 10 Words. In Jesus' name, Amen.