The Great Gift

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“Then God spoke all these words: [2] I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; [3] you shall have no other gods before me. [4] 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. [5] 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, [6] but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. [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. [8] Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor and do all your work. [10] 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. [11] 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. [12] Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. [13] You shall not murder. [14] You shall not commit adultery. [15] You shall not steal. [16] You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. [17] 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.” (Exodus 20:1-17).

1. World Communion Sunday

The first Sunday in October is World Communion Sunday. All around the world, congregations gather to celebrate our unity as Christians. World Communion Sunday is a day to remember that the different languages, traditions, and customs make up the body of Christ when we celebrate the Lord’s supper. On this day we celebrate with worship and the Lord’s supper that we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

On World Communion Sunday we affirm that our relationships with one another are a gift from God. As we celebrate World Communion Sunday, Christine and I give thanks to God for us to be part of Swift Memorial Congregation. If I were not a Methodist pastor, our relationship with you would not be possible.

2. The Great Gift

When we think back on the story of the Israelites in the Old Testament, what do you think was the greatest gift God gave to his people? The greatest gift was 1) God's love and the deliverance from slavery in Egypt, and 2) God's covenant relationship with his people through the Ten Commandments.

In Exodus 19:4, God reminds the Israelites of what God has done, "***You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself***." God reminds the Israelites of how much he loves them and protects them, like an eagle caring for their young.

In verses 5 & 6, God promises, "***you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,*** [6] ***but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation."*** God tells the people that they will be exalted if they would keep the covenant. They said yes to the Lord through Moses. When Moses receives the Ten Commandments at Mt. Sinai, the people of Israel have a special relationship with God. How can they maintain this special relationship with the Lord?

3. The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20 talks about each commandment of the Ten. Why were the Ten Commandments given to the Israelites? Imagine life in Egypt. As slaves, the people of Israel would have been exposed to different gods and idols. The people in Egypt worshipped these many gods so that they would get the maximum number of blessings.

After leaving Egypt, God reminds the Israelites that they should worship only God. In verse 2, the Lord says, "***I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*** God summarizes what he has done for the people and reminds the Israelites how they can maintain their special relationship with God.

God emphasizes, "***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.*** [5] ***You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God"*** (verses 4 & 5). The people are told that there is one true God, Yahweh, and that they are to worship the Lord always.

4. The Great Commandment

Did Jesus talk about the Ten Commandments? In Matthew 22:34 and the following, one of the Sadducees and the Pharisees asks Jesus which is the greatest commandment in the law. The man was an expert in the Law. Jesus replies that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord God with all our hearts, with all our souls and with all our minds and the second commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus summarizes the first part and the second part of the Ten Commandments.

5. Marriage Relationship

Whenever I read the Ten Commandments, the wedding covenant is imprinted on my mind. Marriage is a commitment made to one person among many. When God gives the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, the Lord is making a proposal. Like a marriage, God is creating a special relationship with the people of Israel.

Isaiah 54:5 says, "***For your Maker is your husband…*** [6] ***For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit.*** Isaiah tells Israel that the Lord is like a husband taking back Israel. God's compassion and loyal love restores the relationship that Israel has with God.

This October, Christine and I will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary. Many years ago, we were married in the first Methodist Church in Seoul, Korea. It was founded by the first Methodist missionary.

I remember being a new husband and wanting to always make Christine happy. I'm sure that wasn't always the case. But when I look back, I remember that many times I was like the Israelites, but Christine showed me patience and unconditional love.

Marriage reminds us of the relationship that God has with us. Even though the Israelites disappointed God many times, God continued to show his never-ending love. As we follow Jesus, we experience the unconditional love and this special relationship that the Israelites had with God in our passage.

6. Conclusion

The Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a reminder of their special relationship with the Lord. The Ten Commandments are like a wedding ring, a constant reminder of God's covenant relationship with his people. When we read the Ten Commandments, God reminds us that each one of us has a special relationship with God. God always loves us and is with us 24 hours a day.

7. Application

The CDC guidelines recommend limiting face-to-face contact with others to reduce the spread of COVID-19. At the same time, there are reports of increased isolation and loneliness among older adults increasing many mental problems.

How do we stay free from anxiety and loneliness during a time when we are supposed to be physically distanced from others? I believe that remembering God's love and God's great gift for us would help us to overcome the challenges that we face in this life.

The Ten Commandments are the great gift for the Jews. Jesus is the greatest gift for followers of Christ. In Luke Chapter 2, when Simeon sees the baby Jesus in the Temple, he praises the Lord, "***Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; [30] for my eyes have seen your salvation.***" (verses 29 & 30). Simeon says that he is able to die in peace now that he has seen the Messiah.

We have a great gift as followers of Christ. That gift is Jesus. St. Paul says, "***through him (Jesus) both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. [19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God."*** Jesus is the one who made all of us have a special relationship with God and one another. Are we grateful to Jesus and enjoy the privilege of the great gift of Jesus? Amen and Amen.