

If I can be completely honest with you, I have really been struggling with what to preach this morning. A few weeks ago, we began a journey together using the narrative lectionary to guide us in our scripture selections for Sunday. We began with the story of Noah and the flood, we heard stories of Abram and Sarai and then Joseph. As we continue through the cycle of scripture we will make our way through the Bible hearing the stories of our faith. The scripture selection for today is Exodus 19:1-7, 20:1-17 which is what Jack read for us a few minutes ago. This is a familiar text for many of us and even if this is the first time you have ever heard the actual scripture it is likely that you have some familiarity with the Ten Commandments even if it is just an image of Charlton Heston coming down the mountain in his flowing red robe holding two large stone tablets.

As I prepared for the sermon this week, news continued to unfold around the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to a seat on the Supreme Court. I'm sure some of you just groaned a little inside because you were hoping that you could come to church and escape the news and the real world for an hour. But I know from talking to some of you and reading your Facebook posts, that for many of us, the events of the past week have been extremely painful. The topic of sexual assault was front and center, sometimes re-opening old wounds and giving new life to old pain that you had hoped was dead and gone. It would be irresponsible of me to get into this pulpit this morning and ignore something that is front and center in the hearts and minds of a large portion of my congregation.

To be clear, this is not an issue of political party. This is not about democrats and republicans. This is about how we treat one another as fellow human beings. This is about the heartless way our leaders mocked and ridiculed a woman in pain and by extension all women who have suffered at the hands of an abuser. This is about the trauma that has been revisited upon survivors of sexual assault for the sake of political expediency. This is about women protesting in the senate gallery being called animals by a reporter who suggested they should be tasered, handcuffed, and dragged out of the building. It would be foolish of me to assume that everyone in this room is of the same mind around this story and we need to be mindful of the diversity of opinions in the room. But whether you believe Dr. Ford or believe Judge Kavanaugh or if you wish people would just stop talking about it, I hope we can all agree that every human being is a child of God and deserves to be treated as such.

This brings us back to our scripture reading this morning - this list of rules from God. A lot has happened since our last reading with Joseph and Potiphar's wife. The Israelite people were enslaved by Egypt's Pharaoh, and God, through Moses, has led them to freedom. At this point in the story, it's as if God wants to make sure everyone is on the same page before going much further. It's like that point when relationship starts to get serious and one of you says, "where is this relationship headed?" God and the Israelites needed to have a serious talk about what it meant to be in this committed relationship to one another.

The list of commandments are often broken down into rules for right relationship with God, and rules for right relationship with our neighbors. Jesus sums these up as well as all the teachings of the prophets into these words: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. Basically, love God with every fiber of your being.

I attended a clergy gathering on Thursday and Friday and the keynote presenter was a Lutheran pastor with a PhD in Systematic Theology. Early in her conversation with us, she pointed out that the first commandment reads "...you shall have no other gods before me." It does not say, there are no other gods. She then went on to quote Martin Luther who wrote "That upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your god." (Luther's Large Catechism) Everyone has a god. Whatever it is in which we put our ultimate trust – that is our god. For some people that god is money, dedicating their heart, mind, and soul to anything that will make the biggest profit. For some people that god is power, putting their trust in the notion that becoming more and more powerful is the most important thing in life and will assure their happiness. For some it is status, fame. Ideologies can become gods. Conservatism, liberalism, fascism, socialism, patriarchy, white supremacy. Putting our ultimate trust in any of these things will ultimately disappoint us because they are not the ultimate God.

I mentioned earlier that I struggled with what to preach this morning. One of the things I struggled with was connecting the scripture and the events of the past few weeks with the celebration of World Communion Sunday. I mentioned to a colleague that it felt like I was trying to make a quilt out of materials that are meant to be sewn together. But as I continued to reflect, I think a celebration of

World Communion Sunday might be exactly what we need right now. We need to be reminded that the world is bigger than our little corner of it. We have watched the god of Nationalism gain more and more followers with rhetoric like “America First” and increased pressure to venerate the national anthem and the American flag as if they are holy objects made by God herself. This World Communion Sunday calls us remember who our God truly is. In whom or what do we place our ultimate trust?

In the days and weeks ahead, let us spend as much time in prayer and worship as we do reading the newspaper or ranting on social media. Let us spend some time intentionally cultivating a relationship with the God who deserves our ultimate trust. Let us rest in the hope of the resurrection – that the ways of death and destruction never have the last word. Let us also not forget that loving God is not only about prayer and worship. To love God and to put our ultimate trust in God means that we must love others as well. So, let our prayers inspire us in our actions. Let us seek out the ways of God’s justice and love and live them with our words and with our deeds. May our love of God fill us with hope and energy to not give up in the pursuit of bringing God’s kin-dom here to earth. A kin-dom in which no one is victimized, where people of all genders are treated as equals. A kin-dom in which no one goes hungry or sleeps on the street. A kin-dom in which the god of safety and security is not worshipped to such a degree that it becomes more important than the wellness of children and adults seeking refuge and asylum. A kin-dom in which the gods of greed, wealth, and power have no authority.

We are children of God and we share that title with every single human being on the planet. Let us remember that our God is bigger than borders, bigger than politics, bigger than the ways in which power tries to divide us. Our God is the God of all the world and the depths of the cosmos. May we be purveyors of God’s love, cultivators of God’s hope, and builders of relationship instead of walls. Amen.