

### *Law and Shema*

Text(s): Deut. 5:1-22 & 16:1-8

- Pastor Kari Pancoast

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today our text is the Ten Commandments, but first let's have a quick review to set the scene. Let's go back to the very beginning for just a minute. Since we're reading through the Bible as story again this year, it's good to know where we are in the story! Remember, we start out hearing that God created everything that exists. He created it out of nothing, for his own joy and pleasure. Remember in the creation story: at the end of each of the first five days, God was happy with his creation, saying it was good. And then at the end of the sixth day, after God created people, he looked at what he had made and said it was very good. God loves us! He was pleased with us, saying we are very good. We are created in his image to bring him joy. God create us to live together with him in love. We're told that the best part of the day in the Garden of Eden was when God would come and walk with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening. It was paradise.

But we know what happened next. Sin entered the world. Everything fell apart. God's precious creation turned on him—rejected him, was afraid of him. So God sent us from the garden until he could destroy sin and restore his creation to the good that he intended.

So, God chose Abraham and Sarah to put into action his plan to restore his precious creation. He promised that through their descendents he would bless the whole world. We heard the story a few weeks ago of the promise of their son Isaac. Then Isaac grew up and had a son Jacob, whose name God later changed to Israel. Jacob, or Israel, had twelve sons; Joseph and his brothers. Remember Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt but God was with him and cared for him and used him to care for his people. Remember Joseph eventually became a leader in Egypt, the Pharaoh's second in command. Joseph forgave his family and they came to live there; they prospered and the family grew. But the years went by and there was a new pharaoh who didn't remember Joseph or his God; and his family—the Israelites—were seen as a threat to the pharaoh and they were made to be slaves. So God used Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

So we get to the scene for our texts for this morning. The Israelites are in the wilderness, on a journey from their old life of slavery to a new life of freedom as God's people who are to be a blessing to the world. So now, in our lessons for this morning, Moses gathers God's people, reminds them that they belong to God and tells them what that means for who they are and how they live. So often we think of the Ten Commandments as laws or rules that we need to live by in order to make God happy and earn his favor and avoid punishment. Or maybe we think of the Ten Commandments as unnecessary rules that stifle our freedom.

But the Ten Commandments are so much more than rules. They are the description of how our life is to be as God's precious children in this world. God giving us these commandments is his gathering us back to himself, to live together with him in peace and joy. He wants us to know we belong to him and that that means something for how we live! He wants our lives to be filled with joy and peace and love. So he gives us these commandments.

The first three commandments talk about our relationship with God. He is our God. We belong to him! Don't make something else into a god instead! God says, "I am a jealous God! You are mine! I want

you to live together with me!” And when he says he will punish us to the third and fourth generations for rejecting him, God isn’t threatening us. But rather he is spelling out the reality of the result of living apart from him. The punishment is our own doing, it isn’t anything God has to do to us! Our rejecting God in favor of something else will always let us down. Too often we put our trust and devotion in things like money, other people, our possessions or homes, our activities, our jobs... any number of things. We let other things push God out of our lives. We turn away from God—sometimes with out even meaning to. And when we turn away from God, we suffer and those around us suffer. The effects are long lasting and far reaching.

So God tells us to put our trust in him. Nothing else is worthy of our trust and devotion and worship. Only God! ... Which brings us to the next commandment: Use God’s name only for calling on him! The Spark Story Bible puts it well. God says: *My name is special. Don’t use it with bad words or mean talk.* And finally, concerning our relationship with himself, God tells us to take a day of rest each week and make it a special time for us to spend with him. God knows that we need time set aside for him if we are going to maintain any kind of a relationship with him in our busy lives. Remember, he made us to live together with him; he made us for his own joy and companionship. He wants us to know his love!

So the first three commandments are about us and God. The rest of the commandments talk about our relationship with each other as we live together as God’s people in the world. Treat your parents and those who take care of you with love and respect. Don’t hurt others with your words or actions, but help them to know God’s love. Be faithful to your husband or wife. Let your life together be a reflection of God’s faithfulness and goodness. Don’t take things that aren’t yours, but rather help others take care of what they have. Don’t speak badly of others, but rather help to build them up with kind words. Be thankful for what you have. Don’t wish someone else’s wife or family or things were yours. That only hurts you and them and it makes you not appreciate what you have.

These commandments are given to us for our own benefit, to help us know God’s love in our lives and to live in that love with others. These commandments are meant to shape our lives by God’s love for us and all his precious creation. They are the description of how our life is to be as we live in God’s love. God giving us these commandments is his gathering us back to himself, to live together with him in peace and joy—his giving us these commandments is God’s bringing us back. Just as the Israelites needed to be reassured of God’s love and care for them as they journeyed through the wilderness, we need to know God is with us. Especially in times like these, we need to know we belong to God—we need to know he loves us and will continue to take care of us no matter what life throws at us. These commandments are God bringing us back to himself.

The lesson we read today from Deuteronomy 6 comes right after Moses gives the Israelites the Ten Commandments. He goes on to say, *Hear O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone.* It’s often called the Shema, which means listen. Moses says: Listen Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. As he was bringing the Israelites back to himself, God was saying, “This is important! Know my love for you with all your heart! Teach it to your children.”

This is what God is saying to us, too! In the midst of the chaos and devastation we face in our lives, God is bringing us back to himself. He wants us to know what it means that we belong to him—the God who made us for himself to love! He wants us to share this wonderful joy of belonging to him with our children! So according to what God tells us, who is suppose to teach our children about God's love for them? (And by children I don't just mean our own kids, but also those around us of any age who don't know God's love for them.) We are! Parents, grandparents, families, friends! The Bible doesn't say leave it to the experts, like Sunday school teachers or pastors. So then, how do we know what to tell our kids about God? We learn about him ourselves. God wants us to know him by heart! And when do we talk about God's love for us? Just Sunday morning? Or Wednesday at church? No—all the time. When we're sleeping and when we're not sleeping. When we're home and when we're not home. That pretty much has it covered, I'd say! And finally, we are to keep God's word right in front of us all the time!

God made us to be his own. And by the death and resurrection of Jesus, he forgives all our sins and brings us back to himself over and over again. He gives us his commandments to shape our lives as we live together with him and each other in the gracious love that he has for each one of us. Thanks be to God. Amen.