

This morning the Old Testament text talks about the Ten Commandments.

First of all, this is not one of my favorite parts of the Bible. One reason is it sounds too much like rules and laws. A more honest reason is perhaps we have heard and know about it but we never kept it the way we should.

Last week, we had a Pastoral Leadership Conference at the seminary. One of the panelists shared her personal experience. She said that one day she asked her 10 year-old son on the way home from church, “Hey, what did you learn today?” “They said I should obey you.” Feeling a little bit shocked and looking into the mirror while she was driving, this seminary professor mother said to her son in the back seat: so what do you think about that, tell me!

“It never occurred to me” was his answer, she said.

Maybe the same thing can happen with the story of the Ten Commandments; it may not sound that meaningful to us unless we find that it is real in our hearts.

In that respect, what God tells them is very clear at the beginning. Before anything else, God says to the Israelites, “I am the One who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” In other words, God is putting it in context; when the Israelites heard this story, it was real in their hearts; it was not empty rules and laws.

The people of Israel are now gathered under the foot of Mt. Sinai.

This was an exciting moment; I would say that this was one of the holiest moments in their entire journey; just imagine that we are among hundreds of thousands of people at the foot of Mt. Diablo here in the Bay Area; we are there to see God literally come down from heaven; can you imagine what that may look like?

If you read chapter 19, that is what happened there at the foot of Mt. Sinai. What would you do in terms of preparation if you were to be there in the presence of God literally?

Well, according to the text, first, they were to wash their clothes and have themselves ready for the 3rd day. On the 3rd day, the Lord would come down and they were not allowed to go up the mountain; they were not supposed to touch the edge of the mountain either. Does that mean they were just to stand somewhere looking up at the mountain? Yes.

Then did they see God with their own eyes? No. What they saw was only the smoke on the mountain. It says, on that day, there was a violent earthquake along with thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were there trembled.

And there was only one man who was allowed to come up to the top of the mountain: Moses. There Moses was given the Ten Commandments.

God did not just spell out the Ten Commandments just as a bunch of Dos and Don'ts. The Ten Commandments was a covenant God made with the Israelites as they started a new journey coming out of slavery; it was rather God's expression of continual love for his people. God did not want His people to forget who they were, let alone how they came to be who they were.

By saying “I am the One who brought you out of Egypt,” God made sure that they would not forget where they had come from: the life of slavery, the life of no hope, the life of death, and the life of no future.

When I was reading the text verse 8 hit me hard: “Remember the day of Sabbath and keep it holy.”

It is not just “Don’t work on Sunday” thing. It is more of God’s reminder of who He is, and what He would do for his people.

So on this day of Sabbath we are to set aside this time; it is not just a day of rest; it is rather a day of showing our confidence in God’s promise; instead of worrying about things and trying to make the ends meet, we put our total trust in God; we put all our hearts and all our confidence in God alone.

That is what the day of Sabbath is about.

We come to God to express our faith; we come to God to show our love for Him; we come to God to tell Him where we have been and how we have been in the past 6 days and ask Him to renew and restore us to who we should be.

We come to God asking for mercy; we come to God asking for grace; we come to God asking for wisdom; we come to God asking for guidance.

We come to God for strength; we come here to be uplifted by the Spirit.

Especially during this Lenten season, we come to God to be cleansed in our hearts. Today’s Gospel text shows us that Jesus cleansed the Temple; he overturned the tables of money exchangers.

Last week at the Pastoral Leadership Conference, Ron Fisher, a pastor of Taylor Memorial UMC, asked Dr. James Forbes for some tips for today’s preaching based on the story of cleansing the Temple.

Forbes pointed out that many of today’s preachers become Pharisees and Scribes once they become ordained. So instead of thinking of how to cleanse the Temple and overturn the tables, he suggested that we cleanse our hearts first!

That was a huge message to all of us. But I think that message applies to all of us.

I know there are social issues preachers need to mention in pulpit; there are issues of injustice our churches have to get involved in. But sometimes we forget that how sinful we are as human beings; we forget how arrogant we are.

Paul said that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in us (1 Cor. 6:19).

During this Lenten season, we might want to focus on cleansing the temple each one of us has.

How? We do that through prayer and meditation. We do that through reading the scripture; when we read the Bible, the Bible teaches us where we are.

We have been talking about the Ten Commandments: one of the things it does to us is helping us to realize our shortcomings and weaknesses.

Most importantly, it will help us to know who God is:

God says, “It is I, not you, who took you out of Egypt, the land of slavery.” God wants us to know this fact; it is not we but God who made us who we are.

We all have had some dark moments in our lives; but God has been gracious to all of us to reach out to us with His love and forgiveness.

God let us get out of our own land of Egypt and helped us journey toward the Promised Land which is the gift of salvation.

On this Day of Sabbath, I want all of us to know that God really wants us to be free spiritually and mentally. Remember He is the one

“Day of Sabbath,” Exodus 20:1-17; John 2:13-22; Lent 3: March 15, 2009; Albany UMC

who has taken us out of the land of Egypt through Jesus Christ who died on the cross.

Thanks be to God. Amen.