

Exodus 19:1-9; 20:1-17

Tables and Tablets

October 7, 2018-World Communion Sunday

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\*National Lampoon Vacation slide

Have you ever traveled with someone who is not, “a good traveler”?

What behaviors go with not being “a good traveler”?

Most of us probably have a story or two of road trips gone bad. My own experience traveling with road trip companions who are not “good travelers” is that as soon as we reach our destination, I can’t wait to separate myself from them, even if only for a little while.

In our text today, God has been on quite a road trip with the Israelites and, I have to say, they have not been “good travelers”. Last week we listened while they whined that they would rather go back to Egypt as slaves than risk crossing the Red Sea. The story ended with God fixing it, allowing them to walk the sea and not get wet. Even after that bit of supernatural help, the whining and complaining continued as they wandered in the wilderness...and God continued to fix it, changing bitter water to sweet, raining manna from the sky, and bringing water from a rock. In the face of all of their complaints, God was unwavering in God’s devotion to Israel. In today’s text, the road trip toward the promised land of Canaan pauses at the foot of Mt. Sinai.

**\*19** On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>2</sup>They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: <sup>4</sup>You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I

bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup> but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites."

<sup>7</sup> So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. <sup>8</sup> The people all answered as one: "Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do." Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after."

Following this exchange, Moses had the people prepare for a meeting with God. This theophany, like others ancient Near East religions, contains a number of images for God including thunder and lightning, volcanoes, and the sound of a trumpet. Following God's appearance to all the people, Moses and Aaron went to the top of Mt. Sinai.

**20** Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before <sup>[a]</sup> me.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation <sup>[b]</sup> of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup> You shall not murder. [\[c\]](#)

<sup>14</sup> You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

We've been talking a lot about covenant this fall. In the story of Noah and the flood, God made a covenant with Noah and all of creation, requiring nothing in return. Through it, God committed to working with us, to not give up on creation, even though human beings tend to mess things up. Later, God called Abram to leave his home and go to Canaan and entered into covenant with him, promising to make of him a great nation. And today, the story continues with God's covenant with Israel. The covenant established here is the heart of the book of Exodus. Through it, the Israelites, in the wake of Divine deliverance from Pharaoh's Egypt, are to obey God, and in turn, God's promise to them was that they would be God's "treasured possession," a "priestly kingdom and a holy nation." To help the Israelites live out their part, the ten commandments were provided by God, to teach Israel how to live what it meant to be people of God.

Looking back at last week's story, as the Israelites fled the Egyptian army, God acted to give freedom *from* Pharaoh. In today's text, God acted to give Israel freedom *for* relationship, both with God and with one another. At the Red Sea, freedom from slavery; at Mt. Sinai, freedom for life together.

\*The first commandment given freed the people to worship only one God. Israel would not be required to make offerings and do the bidding of multiple gods like their neighbors who practiced other ancient Near East traditions. They were freed for relationship with the God who over and over demonstrated faithfulness to them.

\*The people were free to rest, free from relentless obligation, because God gave them the Sabbath. Like the bow in the sky and male circumcision, Sabbath was a visible sign of covenant between God and God's people. The Israelites were free to stop producing. Their worth was not defined by what they created, but by their Creator.

\*"You shall not steal," freed the Israelites for relationships and community based on mutual trust, not having to always be on their guard, afraid someone would take what was theirs.

Does this make sense? The commandments were not rules made to restrict God's people, instead they were a new way, a better way of being in community (of traveling together) that nurtured strong relationships, both among the people and with God. The commandments were provided to guide Israel in living together as God's people.

In many ways, gathering at the communion table serves the same function for us. In the Disciples tradition, the way we behave toward one another at the Table, reminds us and teaches us how we are supposed to live together as God's people in the world.

We believe there is room for everyone around that Table. We believe that not only is there room for everyone, we are called to welcome everyone at the Table. We believe, at that Table, there is no hierarchy,

nobody is “more than” or “less than.” The Table reminds us we were created for relationship and we are better together.

\*Today, is World Communion Sunday, a day set aside to celebrate this Table as an extension of every other communion table around which all kinds of different people are gathered today. Each community gathered this morning has its own traditions, its own theology, its own favorite bread and wine or juice. We are honoring some of those traditions today with different types of bread on our Table, in fact. But, no matter what kind of bread or wine is on the Table, whether the Table is formal and ornate or a simple tray in the middle of a circle of friends, at their center is God. It is God who gathers all of us, all over the world, to, hopefully, remember that we are part of something bigger than the here and now. We are part of a movement that started more than 2000 years ago with Jesus and the community that sprang up around him. His followers were slow to catch on, lacked subtlety and tact, and sometimes, frankly, got it very wrong. And yet, here we are. Here we are, still trying to figure out what it means, and whether we have the courage, to follow Jesus.

And today, especially, we have to try to figure out what it means to be in communion with our brothers and sisters all over the world and right down the street. What does it mean to make space at the Table for the ones with whom we disagree? Can we speak truth to power and make room for the powerful at this Table? We have to. We have to because, if not, this Table is just like any other table, where human beings decide who has a seat and who doesn't...and we've seen how well that works out. This Table isn't like other tables. This Table gives us a glimpse of the world as it ought to be, but hopefully that glimpse is enough to make us want to do the work of bringing that world about.

We cannot let what's going on in our country change who we are. At our core, we are people of this Table.

Jesus taught his followers, and through that tradition, we have been taught that justice matters; that we are called to stand with the ones who are vulnerable and afraid and the ones who have been silenced and mocked, and that there is nobody who is excluded from God's kingdom. At every turn, Jesus reached out to the ones who didn't belong and said, "You have a place here." Today, as we celebrate World Communion Sunday let us draw the circle of inclusion wider than we have ever imagined. Amen.