

**Rules**  
**The Monroe Congregational Church, UCC**  
**Rev. Jennifer Gingras**  
**October 7, 2018**

*Exodus 19:7, 20:1-17*

Two freshman come home off the bus from school. They live on the same street, just a few houses away. Their mothers are best friends since high school. They often share parenting tips over morning coffee, they even designed a chore list together which each family proudly displays in their kitchen.

The first teen, let's call him Ted, opens his front door from a rough day at school to hear his mother yelling from the laundry room *"Don't even think about turning on that Fortnight video game until you clean your room. I can't believe you left it that way this morning. What kind of pigsty do you want to live in?"* Ted rolls his eyes, drops his backpack, lets out a deep sigh, and makes his way to the kitchen for a snack.

The second teen, let's call her Mandy, has had an equally miserable day at school. She enters her house to be greeted by the family dog and a note which says: "Out at the store, home soon, you know what to do, love you – Mom.". Mandy smiles to herself, takes the dog for a quick walk, runs up the stairs two at a time, straightens her bedroom and gets a head start on her homework.

Two young people, under the authority of more or less the same set of rules, but with two very different results.

In Ted's case, he knew what he had to do but resented the negative way in which he was called to do it. Maybe he'd get to his homework eventually. Probably not. Negativity and shame can take its toll.

Mandy's experience was different. When she was reminded of her responsibilities and encouraged with words of love, she did exactly what was expected of her. Perhaps it had something to do with the respect. Or maybe, the trust.

*Which of these two houses would YOU like to live in?*

If we are going to live together successfully in community we need some sort of ground rules. Whether we belong to a family, a school, a church, a sports team or other social group, it's really important to know what's considered basic standards of behavior. So that we know how to treat each other.

That's why we have laws, because otherwise people might just do what they wanted without even thinking about their connection to community, or the ways the people around them might be hurt.

The behavioral covenant gave Moses sounded a little something like this: God first. Only God. Respect God. Rest. Care for the vulnerable. Value life. Keep your commitments. Live honestly. Speak truthfully. Be content.

Even after all these thousands of years later... I think to myself, what a radical way to live!

How would our society change if each one of us truly lived these commandments? How would our individual lives be transformed if we took just one, and lived it for a year, to the fullest? What would that do to this town, our region, our world?

God gave the commandments to the people so that they could show the world what living in balance looked like in real life. These are supposed to be a framework to help liberated people keep in balance the three great loves: love of God, love of neighbor, love of self.

We remember, as we turn our focus now to sharing communion with one another, that living this call is still ours today. Amen.