

Written on the Heart
The Monroe Congregational Church
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Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-9, Mark 12:28-31

Last week we heard that a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph, which led to the enslavement of the Hebrew people. When we don't know the tales of history, we forget the lessons learned from our ancestor's mistakes and we are doomed to repeat them. I don't know about you, but I'd rather learn from the blunders of my elders than suffer the pain of making them myself!

But for now, let's just move on. We left Moses at the burning bush. Since then, he traveled back to Egypt to have a chat with his adoptive granddad, the Pharaoh. It did not go so well in the beginning, but after many requests and 10 nasty plagues, the Israelites were finally able to leave Egypt. They crossed on dry land through the Red Sea, drank water from rocks, ate manna from heaven and eventually made their way to Mt. Sinai, where they received the first copy of the 10 Commandments.

Now, Moses was on that mountain with God for a long time. So long, in fact, that the people below seemed to forget the things God had done for them. They wanted a deity they could see and touch, so they melted down all their jewelry, made a Golden Calf, and threw a big party.

Predictably, this made God and Moses quite displeased with the people. Moses broke all 10 Commandments at once by throwing the tablets on the ground. Fortunately, once he took a breath and calmed down, Moses was able to convince God to NOT wipe out the entire population and start over again.

Instead, the Hebrew people were sentenced to 40 years of wandering around the wilderness in a geographic location about the size of Greater Fairfield, looking for their final destination: the Promised Land. They made lots of circles, I guess!

And now we arrive at today's story... The book of Deuteronomy is the final book of the Torah. It is basically Moses' farewell speech; it takes place right before he dies and the people finally enter the promised land.

In the earlier part of this speech, he gives them the Shema, words which become one of the most important passages to the Jewish faith, so important that many observant Jews today pronounce them both in the morning and the evening.

Hear, O 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.

Moses tells them to keep these words in your heart. This is the key. This is what defines you. Teach it to your children in every aspect of their daily lives. Then he proceeds to remind them what was on those tablets he brought down the mountain, whose words are familiar to us, too.

When we teach the Ten Commandments to our kids, we might break it out like this...

The first tablet contains commands about loving God, you know:

Don't make idols,
Don't misuse God's name,
Keep the Sabbath (and go to church!)

Then the second tablet, the rest of the commandments are about loving your neighbor...

Honor your parents
Don't murder
Don't cheat
Don't steal
Don't lie
Don't covet.

Pretty simple, right?

Two stone tablets hewn together. Because... it is impossible to separate Loving God from Loving your neighbor. That's what Jesus taught, recorded in every gospel – so you know it's true.

Let's make this really practical. Let's say you are standing in line at the grocery store. The guy in front of you has a \$20 bill in his pocket. Of course, no one here would reach in his pocket and take the money – that's stealing!

But let's say he drops the 20 on the floor. He doesn't notice, there are a million things going on in his mind as he opens his wallet to find his ATM card. Nobody else sees it. You and I might be tempted to put our foot on the bill. Slide it over. This guy looks like he could spare it. Bend down to tie your shoe, and viola, you are 20 bucks richer.

But if you're loving your neighbor, you point out to him that he dropped the \$20.

Or maybe you're driving to work and trying to merge onto the highway. The lady in the SUV next to you won't let you in. The commandment says, don't murder, thankfully you keep your cool enough not to respond with physical aggression. Instead, maybe you spew out a bunch a curse words that I probably shouldn't repeat in this Meetinghouse. And you find it hard to set down your anger for the next ten miles.

If you're loving your neighbor, you take a deep breath and move on.

Or maybe you have great intentions of resting and slowing down on your day "off" but then you say 'yes' to a lunch meeting. That lunch meeting leads to further scheduling and e-mailing. And, well since you're already out and about you might as well run a few errands. And by the time you get home, all your energy is drained. That's when the mindless Netflix binge begins. Before you know it, you call it a night.

I bet you know what that's like. And, I bet you know what it's like the next morning, when you wake up feeling unrested, like your life is out of balance and you never have a chance to slow down.

Eventually, you resent feeling that way. It's a vicious cycle, because from that lack of rest, we get short tempered with our partners and children and other people who care about us. We find ourselves feeling less creative and spiritually empty, maybe it gets so bad that we feel like we have lost touch with God. When we keep our heads down, our minds consumed with agendas, when we don't look up, we might miss the ways God is speaking to us in our lives.

If you're loving your neighbor, you take time to rest. We need Sabbath in order to be healthy and whole.

God's Law is, above all else, a gift meant to enable and further human well-being, and yet - it isn't about "us," per se. The law is really about our neighbors. We are given these rules to follow, so that our neighbor can live in a safe, respectful, loving community - which is our collective responsibility.

Live as you ought to live, do as you ought to do—and you'll know God is with you. Doesn't mean it's always easy. It's part of the struggle, to remember to love God and our neighbor always, with our whole being, and keep our focus on that when the world seems to be getting worse. The message today is simple, yet incredibly difficult.

Remember this. Write it on your heart: God loves you and has set you free so that you can love your neighbor. That's it. As we go about our everyday lives, how can we live that wisdom in all that we do? Amen.