

*The Third Sunday in Lent*  
March 8, 2015  
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Exodus 20:1-17

*And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [ generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor." (NIV)*

“Do!” “Don’t do!” “You shall not!” “You must!” Rules, regulations, commands – how do you feel about these things? The rebellious child in us doesn’t care a whole lot for rules. Commands are often contrary to what our sinful nature wants. Too many regulations almost seems un-American to us. We want the right to choose! Why should anyone else tell us what we can say or what we should do? Who gives anyone the right to tell us how to live?

Yet, what would things look like without any rules, regulations, or commands? As much as we may fight against these things it would be very unwise to think they are not needed. What would it be like driving out on the roads if we took away every single stop sign? Should we get rid of all instructions and throw away every map and GPS device? After all, no one should tell you how to do something. No one should tell us where to go and how we should get there.

That kind of thinking is foolish! We need rules, regulations, and commands! We need instructions and guidance. We need the law. This is even more true when it comes from our God! And God does not disappoint us. God gives us His commands. He tells what to do and not to do. He teaches us how to live and guides us in the way we should go. As we listen today to God giving His people the Ten Commandments, I pray we realize how foolish it would be to think we don’t need them or are somehow better off without them. Dear friends: **Remember these are the commands of the Lord your God!**

The Lord your God is a jealous God. Do you recall how the Lord made it clear He was serious about all these words He spoke? The Israelites had been camped at Mt. Sinai for three days when on the third morning *“there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud*

*over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast.” Not surprisingly, “everyone in the camp trembled.” Then “Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.”* (If only God would do this for me when I teach the commandments in confirmation class I’m sure every kid would be paying attention!) Then the Lord called Moses to Him and told him to warn the people not to force their way through to see the Lord or they will perish. After Moses went to tell them this, now we read: **“And God spoke all these words.”**

As you listen to them remember the Lord your God is a jealous God. So God is very serious when He says: ***“You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.”*** This first command is the backbone of all the other commandments. He is the only true God. God will not share His glory. He demands to come first in our lives – always. We are to fear and love and trust in God above all things. The next two commands also deal with our love for God. ***“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”*** It isn’t just three letters in a text when you type OMG. It is a careless use of God’s name. He reveals His name to us so we might know Him and be saved by Him. So He is serious about how we use His name. We are to use God’s name to pray, praise, give thanks, and share His name with others. God is also serious about His Word. ***“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”***. God tells His people to set aside a day of the week to worship Him. He wants us to put His Word as a priority and to gladly hear His Word and obey it.

A quick summary of what God commands, in what we call the first table of the law, is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind. Now God also commands and teaches us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. It starts at home. ***“Honor your father and your mother.”*** Children are to obey their parents – in everything. They are to respect their parents – at all times. We are to honor them and all those who represent God. God is not only serious about us honoring our parents but also about how we value life. ***“You shall not murder.”*** We are to value the sanctity of every life from the time a baby is conceived until no matter how many days they have walked the earth. We are not to hate anyone but look to help and befriend others in every need. We are to look put the lives of others and our own into God’s hands.

Our jealous God also cares about marriage and family. So the Lord your God commands that: ***“You shall not commit adultery.”*** The only God pleasing union is that between one man and one woman in marriage. God wants the marriage bed to be kept pure and for husband and wife to love and honor one another. God is serious about the possessions He gives to people. So He demands ***“You shall not steal.”*** Do not take things that do not belong to you! Do not cheat others, not even your employer from an honest day’s work! Do something useful with your hands and look to help others keep the things they have been given. God is also serious about how we talk about others. God commands ***“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”*** It is not right to talk bad about others in an attempt to make yourself look better. It is a sin to gossip. God wants us to always put the best construction on everything. He tells us to take people’s words and actions in the kindest possible way. God’s rules extend not only to what we say. He cares about what we think. He demands even hearts that are pure. So God is serious when He commands: ***“You***

***shall not covet.***” God tells us not to have a sinful desire for anything that is not ours – whether it is our neighbor’s wife or car or house or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

A sermon could easily be written on each of these commandments. But as we quickly went through these commands are you remembering that the Lord your God is a jealous God ***“punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”*** Do you remember how God says whoever stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking them all? Are you able to understand why we call God’s law a mirror because His commands reveal what we look like before Him? Do you see your sins? Do we remember what our sins deserve? If so, that is a good thing. It is good for us to know we are sinners who deserve hell. It is good to know that none of us could stand on our own before God because we all fall short of His glory. None of us have met His demands. None of us have always done what He commands.

This is why I pray as we listen to these commands we know the Lord our God is not just a jealous God, He is also a loving God. Did you catch how God introduces these commandments? Before God tells His people what to do or not do, He reminds them what He has done. ***“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”*** They were God’s people, not because of anything they had done, but by pure grace. He chose to be the Lord their God. He rescued them from their enemies, from their bondage, from their misery, from their slavery. If God were to speak all these words to us Himself today from a mountain think about what He could say to us. I am the Lord your God. I am the God who sent my only Son to be born in a manger for you. Jesus could tell us I am the Son of God who perfectly obeyed every command of God to give you the righteousness you need. God could tell us I rescued you from your sins by dying on a cross for you. I delivered from death and the devil by rising from my grave for you. I am the Lord your God who freed you from the shackles of your sins, from the bondage of the devil, and from an eternity of hell. I am the Lord your God because I chose you to be mine in baptism, because I redeemed you not because of anything you have done, but out of pure grace.

Remember the Lord your God is a loving God. Then listen again to these commands of the Lord our God. Then we recognize God gives us these rules, regulations, and commands because He loves us. This is why He demands to come first. This is why He is so serious about His name and His Word. This is why He protects our home, and life, and marriage, and possessions, and reputation. This is why God is concerned about what is even on our hearts. He gives us these commandments for our good. He wants to bless and keep us. He tells us what to do and not to do because He loves us.

Mark Twain told the story about a man who had memorized the Ten Commandments. He told Twain that his ambition was to go to the Holy Land, stand on the Mount and recite loudly the Ten Commandments. Twain replied, *“Have you ever thought about just staying home and keeping them?”* There has been a lot of talk in recent years about removing the Ten Commandments from being posted in public places. Even more important than whether we post the Ten Commandments on a wall, is whether we are fulfilling the law by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. For when we do, we obey the Lord our God, a God ***“showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*** I pray you always remember these are the commands of the Lord your God! Amen.