

Recite Them To Your Children  
A Sermon for Pilgrim Church  
October 8, 2023  
Rev. Reebee Kavich Girash

Scripture Reading

Deuteronomy 5:1-21; 6:4-9

Moses convened all Israel, and said to them:

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. <sup>2</sup>The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup>Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. <sup>4</sup>The LORD spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the fire. <sup>5</sup>(At that time I was standing between the LORD and you to declare to you the words of the LORD; for you were afraid because of the fire and did not go up the mountain.) And he said:

<sup>6</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>7</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>8</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>9</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 fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>11</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>12</sup> Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup>For six days you shall labour and do all your work. <sup>14</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup>Remember that you were a slave in the land of

Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

16 Honour your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

17 You shall not murder.

18 Neither shall you commit adultery.

19 Neither shall you steal.

20 Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour.

21 Neither shall you covet your neighbour's wife.

Neither shall you desire your neighbour's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

<sup>6</sup>Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. <sup>7</sup>Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. <sup>8</sup>Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, <sup>9</sup>and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

When Diane<sup>1</sup> was a child, whenever she got ready to leave home - for the school day, or a trip, and even when she grew to adulthood and launched into a new life away from home - her parents would take a moment to say,

Listen!

Remember who you are.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. Diane Blum, my childhood pastor in Tennessee.

That quick phrase held deep meaning. Remember who you are, when you go out into the world. Remember when we're not there with you. Remember your roots - that you come from this home and family and community. Remember that we love you. Remember how we've taught you to live. Remember that the world might be one way or another, but this is how we expect our daughter to live. Remember who you are.

I heard that story from Diane when she preached it to the congregation I grew up in. She'd tell the story of her parents' love and their guidance, and then she'd tell us. *Listen. Remember who you are.*

Remember. Beloved children of God, called to love God, called to love our neighbors. Listen, remember who you are. It doesn't matter what the world is doing around you or to you: remember who you are. God loves you. And so, you are to love God and love your neighbors.

And maybe that's what I do up here in this pulpit, too. I say Listen! Remember who you are.

That's surely what Moses was doing.

That's surely part of the message God asked Moses to share with the people, after God had liberated them from Egypt and as they traveled to the promised land.

Listen!

Hear, O Israel.

Remember who you are.

I loved you so much that I liberated you from slavery. And now, I'm sending you in to a new land. While you're there, remember who you are. Don't live according to Pharaoh's rules - love me and love your neighbors and build a different way of life.

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The wisdom of the Ten Commandments is eternal. Which is to say, the Ten Commandments are guidance for people liberated from Egyptian slavery. And the

Ten Commandments are wisdom for people living in Babylonian exile, and people under the rule of Rome, and they are guidance for us, today, looking back on whatever we have faced and looking ahead to what is next.

Time is complicated. Chronos time says that *today* is October 8, 2023. Kairos time winds back the clock thousands of years and says that *today* we have been in the wilderness for 40 years. But kairos time is also 2023.

Kairos time is time beyond clocks, calendars and dates. Kairos time is spiritual time. Kairos time connects people across time and place to God's love and God's word. Kairos time calls us to remember who we are.

Did you catch, in this rather lengthy scripture reading, that Moses brings the people both the gift of God's guidance *and* the gift of kairos time?

Forty years after the people were liberated from slavery in Egypt, after many passed away and new generations were born and grew, and on the cusp of the Promised Land,

“Moses convened all Israel, and said to them:

Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. <sup>2</sup>The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. <sup>3</sup>*Not with our ancestors did the LORD make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today.*”

With us,

Who are all of us here alive today.

This is kairos time.

It is Jewish tradition on the holiday of Shavuot every spring, that every Jew from then to now and to the future, is at Sinai in a moment that transcends time. This moment beyond time connects all the people to God's guidance.

But there is more to this idea than a people being connected to one static moment in time. Because the Jewish people in every generation are at Sinai across time

*and* are working to understand and receive the gift of God's wisdom, the gift of the Torah, for their own particular moment.

I want to be careful here not to imply a Christian appropriation of the Jewish tradition of all Jews throughout time being at Sinai. With my first draft, I actually checked in with a rabbi colleague and she named that I was getting a little close to that. But I do want us to imagine how the ancient wisdom that Jesus considered so important might transcend time and bless us today, as Christians in 2023.

Down our own branch of the religious tree, Christians center Jesus' teachings and honor his rooting in Judaism. So we continue to interpret and receive God's teachings as found in the Hebrew Bible because that was Jesus's tradition. Jesus, when asked what the most important commandment was, pointed to our text from this morning. This is the text our Jewish siblings call the Shema, recited daily in Hebrew:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. <sup>5</sup>You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”

Listen, is another way this text is frequently translated. Listen.

Jesus remembered who he was. And Jesus taught those who followed them, *Listen. Remember who you are.*

Remember who you are.

Love God, the one who loves you. Love your neighbor as yourself.

God loved you so much that God liberated you from slavery. God loved you so much that God was with you in exile. And in Jesus' moment, God loved the people even as they were surrounded by Rome. So Jesus said, even so - Listen. Remember who you are.

Don't live according to Rome's rules - love me and love your neighbors and build a different way of life.

So where are we as Christians in 2023?

Walter Brueggemann points out that Pharaoh is still here, and so is Caesar.

“The word "Egypt" refers to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh is the abusive, brutalizing king of Egypt who practiced and exploited a concentration of power and wealth. You will notice that we do not know Pharaoh's name and that is because Pharaoh keeps turning up in our history time after time. So, Pharaoh is the right name for every brutalizing concentration of wealth and power that acts in violence against vulnerable people. The Exodus is the powerful acknowledgement of that brutalizing domain of human history from which we have been emancipated.”<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps, since Pharaoh is still around, we can imagine Moses saying, Listen!  
Perhaps since Caesar is still around, we can imagine Jesus saying, Listen!  
Remember who you are.

This wisdom is for us, today.

Over and over again, we meet Pharaoh in new forms. So over and over again, we re-learn the ancient good news for our own moment. We build an identity as God’s people. We remember God’s love and learn how to love God and love our neighbors.

Jesus our Teacher taught these commandments to say, Remember who you are. Remember whose you are - you belong to God, not Caesar, not Pharaoh. Love God, the one who loves you. Don’t make idols of money or power or empire. Love your neighbor as yourself. Don’t let anyone live under the weight of slavery or oppression. Live God’s way. Structure your life, and your family’s life, and your community’s life, and the life of the land you’re responsible for, in sustainable weighs that balance productivity and rest. Love God with worship and reverence, give and practice rest, treat everyone with respect and kindness.

Listen. Remember who you are.

Amen.

*Note: I am grateful to Rabbi Jordi Battis from Temple Isaiah, Lexington for talking through some of these concepts with me.*

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<sup>2</sup> [https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2004215/walter\\_brueggemann\\_strategies\\_for\\_staying\\_emancipated](https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5d9b820ef71918cdf2004215/walter_brueggemann_strategies_for_staying_emancipated)