

# Yum

Exodus 19:3-7; 20:1-17

<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.

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**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 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 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. <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.

Within the most structure is the most freedom

Regular time for rest and worship. Jesus came to fulfill the law...not abolish it.

Sabbath is permission to rest which is based on their ancestry. Permission to celebrate ancestry in the honoring of mother and father. Permission to value life. Permission to expect fidelity in personal and spiritual life – as with God so with our partners. We can expect belonging in our relationships as we have been promised it in our relationship with God. Permission to trust God's abundance. God will provide for my needs. We don't need to desire because God supplies all our needs. Permission to love. (Joy J. Moore and her student, Daniel Stevenson)

Church, let's breathe together this morning in this way: if you are willing, we will inhale and exhale three times. On the exhale we will chant YUM. The yum chant is thought to open

our hearts, which is a good place from which to engage the Ten Commandments. Let's go. Inhale... and exhale with YUM. Feel free to return to this chant and to give your body and spirit what it needs this morning. Let's pray: Permission giving God, thank you for loving us enough to send liberators, those who will stand up to Pharoah, those who will keep the community organized and together, and yes, those who will give up their lives to save ours. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear your yummy love in today's text. It is in the holy name of Jesus that we pray. Amen.

Church, we are in the epic, foundational stories of our Christian faith over the next many weeks, and it doesn't get more dramatic than the story of the Ten Commandments. There is a reason Cecil B. DeMille, the most commercially successful producer-director in film history, chose to tell *this*

story. This story and many of the ones that will follow, define for us who God is, how God loves, how humanity rebels and saddens God and how God comes back again and again and again to restore, redefine, resuscitate, and recreate the vision of relationship first seen in the garden.

Many people wrestle with the ten commandments. We think perhaps, that if God really loved us, we would be able to do whatever we wanted. We bristle at being told what to do – after all, we are independently minded folks with free will! Some of us are recovering perfectionists or congregationalists. Some of us are highly competitive and we lament how badly we fail to live this blueprint in our own lives because we want to get it right. Others of us want commandments in place for our neighbors while expecting a grace filled “pass” for ourselves. We wrestle, amen, with what our Jewish siblings call the ten

words, the **only** words God speaks directly to the people rather than through their mediator, Moses. God speaks these words directly to the people because they are that important. The challenge is that we live in a culture that celebrates rule breaking and thumbs its nose at commands. I went looking for quotes about the beauty of rules and commandments and **you** know what I found, c'mon...rules are meant to be broken we say; be bold enough to live life on your own terms; any fool can make a rule and any fool will follow; and my favorite... rules are for children!!! I hope we recognize that in God's eyes we are **all** children, spiritual children, and these 10 words are intended to hold us in much the same way that a blanket is used to hold and swaddle a baby. The commandments provide for our comfort, safety, nurture.

So, we're gonna come at the commandments this morning from what I believe will be new perspective for many of you and I am confident this new way will unlock the yumminess of the ten commandments as it has for me. Rev. Dr. Joy J. Moore and her homiletic's student, Daniel Stevenson...are a gift to the church, and I thank them both for this read that opened a whole new world for me this week.

As we enter into this morning's story, we must first consider the context of the people being commanded. They are several months away from the parting of the Red Sea which means not long removed from their enslavement. Let's plumb what enslavement meant in the biblical witness. The Torah indicates the time of enslavement lasted 430 years, and some rabbis say, given other details in the text, that the enslavement lasted 210 years. What is powerful to understand

is that enslavement lasted a VERY long time. A generation was considered roughly 30 years and so whether you believe 210 years or 430, what is true is that God's covenant people had known **only** enslavement for 7 generations or 14 generations – either way, a very long time, so enslavement was baked into their being. It was difficult, if not impossible to **be** another way...to **think**, to **imagine** another way. And so, might we say that these formerly enslaved folks were candidates for some rules? Some guidelines? Some commandments? And if that sounds harsh, what Dr. Joy and her student invite us to consider is that these commandments were not prohibitions but the HEIGHT of permission giving for those who were formerly enslaved. Think about it: slavery in the ancient near east (which is how we refer to this time period) meant:

One person owned another person – imagine what that would mean if it were you: at base you would have no say over your time, your body, your labor, your children, your partner.

You would have no ownership, no possessions, but have everything given to you with the knowledge that all those things could be taken away. If you were a child, your father could sell you into slavery to pay off a debt, and the children of fathers who died indebted could be taken to fulfill the debt of their father.

If you were indentured, you could look forward to your servitude ending after six years or ending with the Jubilee in the 49<sup>th</sup> year **but** many slave owners failed to comply with the law of God so an indentured person might spend their entire life enslaved! If your owner chose to free you, you might leave with nothing, or a stipend, or if you were very fortunate, you

might have your ancestral lands returned. It's possible that women would exist under these same rules but...they could also be purchased *permanently* as wives.

Enslaved people were marked, branded, or tagged for the purposes of identification. Later in the biblical narrative, we read of enslaved people building Solomon's temple and participating in other large-scale projects. The enslaved people who built the temple worked for months at a time, and many died months after beginning their work. We must imagine this harsh life to understand from where, in God's heart, the commandments emerge.

In the sermon talkback last week, the question was raised about God's utter and complete destruction of Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the Red Sea. Like many of you, I find those stories uncomfortable *and* simultaneously, I said that I want a

God who will come to the rescue of people who've never had anyone come to their rescue before. As a woman, as an African person whose ancestors were enslaved, I want a God who will come for me. When children and adults are trafficked for sex and exploited for labor, I want a God who will swoop in as we read this morning in verse 4 and say, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself." You have seen what I did... so to the pimps and the drug dealers; to the white supremacists who would shoot up a Bible study in a Black church; to those who would beat a trans woman of color to death and claim they feared for their life; to those who would harm the earth and act surprised when Hurricane Ian takes human life...to all of those forgotten and marginalized creatures, I believe we want a God who sees and acts and not only rescues but bears the good

creation up on eagles' wings and brings us to Godself...like a baby... being brought to their parent, like a baby that has been swaddled in a blanket, like a baby longing for comfort, safety, and nurture...Imagine that it is from this place in God's heart that God speaks to these formally enslaved people, while cooing and rocking them to sleep, after generations of no permission...God says you get **all** the permission, baby:

You had so many gods in your enslavement and learned to make idols out of them. Now, you have me, and I love you. I am your only God. Permission to stop making idols. Permission to speak my name, the holy name in love.

In your enslavement, your body and time and dreams were not your own. My commandments give you permission to pause, to rest, to observe a Sabbath, to worship and praise.

This one will be hard because you have **never** paused. You have

never rested. You found your value in what you produced because it's what kept you alive. You could have been killed for not producing, so I understand, but, people who work all the time are called slaves and you are free people now. Permission to live free. Permission to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. Permission to stop and gather in community. Permission to sing and dance and praise me, the God of rest.

During your enslavement, your family members were taken from you...taken to satisfy financial debts. You lost partners and children and parents and friends. Permission to honor your ancestors – your mother, your father and **all** your kinfolk. Treat them real good because now you can!

Permission to value life and live life trusting that I the Lord, will supply your needs. I am in the life-giving business, so you have permission to join me here. I know that during your

captivity life was small, mean, and hardscrabble. You were the property of others, but now you are mine, and I will supply your every need. You need not fear those you love disappearing in the night...permission to expect your partner to be present and faithful. Permission to honor the lives and relationships and possessions of others because **my** children want for nothing. You shall long for nothing because, "indeed, the whole earth is mine." Permission to believe in and expect my abundance.

Ohhhh baby, there's no need to cry. I understand that my commandments are like nothing you've ever heard before. They are like nothing you've ever experienced, but I got you and I will not let you go. I'm holding onto you while you grow into these swaddling clothes, these ten commandments, so...rest easy. Rest free. This new beginning is going to be yummy. To God be the glory. Amen.

