

THE BIG TEN

Order of Service (bulletin)

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October 4, 2026

Pentecost 19

Exodus 20:1-4,7-9,19-20 (from the Lectionary Story Bible)

Moses went up the mountain, into the smoke and fire. There God told him ten important things to remember. We call them the Ten Commandments.

I am your God. I brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Don't pretend there are any other gods. I am the only one.

Don't make pictures or statues or anything else that you think might look like me. Don't bow down to them or pray to them.

Be careful how you use my name. When you speak my name, you must mean what you are saying.

Remember the Sabbath day, the seventh day of the week. Work on the other six days. Rest on the seventh day and make it a special day.

Treat your mother and your father with respect. Be good to them.

Don't kill anyone.

Don't have sex with anyone you are not married to.

Don't steal.

Don't tell lies about anyone.

Don't wish you had things that belong to other people.

The people were afraid when they saw the smoke and heard God's voice. But they said "thank you" to God. They were glad to know how to live in God's way.



You may know that there are some places that think we should have the Ten Commandments put up on the wall for everyone to see. And that's even true in places that profess that there should be a separation between what governments do and what churches do and yet still want the Ten Commandments on the wall of a classroom or a courthouse or some other public place. And the logic is always, *oh, I'm not trying to promote my religion. I just think they are good things for everyone to know about.* And that's true to some degree, at least for the last half of the Ten Commandments.

We read a got to hear a paraphrase of the Ten Commandments today from one of the books that Ralph Milton put together. But I'm guessing that a lot of you have heard at least some or (maybe for some of you) all of those commandments in one way or another. Different translations will use different language.

Some of it makes perfect sense in English. Some of it's a little bit different if we think about the original context

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of Exodus. These were central to the story of the people leaving slavery in Egypt that when they arrived at what was described as the mountain home of God and Moses went up on the mountain and came down and said, "I've talked to God and these are things that God thinks are really important." It gave the people a reminder that they're connected to their God and their God cares about how they live with each other and how they can continue to be in good relation with each other and with their God.

Moses brought down these 10 rules. I love the Mel Brooks scene where he comes down from the mountain with three tablets. *I bring you these 15 commandments (breaks one), uh the 10 commandments.* I would have loved to have seen what the other five were. I'm sure we could all think of another five that could go on the list that would be as important and as faithful to the tradition.

The whole rest of the story of the Exodus, including right up to the all of the laws and rules and expectations that are written down in the book of Deuteronomy. All of that is part of God's expectation. It's not contained only in these 10 rules: the big 10.

When Jesus was asked one time, "What is the big one? What's the big commandment? The most important of everything." Jesus didn't pick one of those big 10. Jesus instead picked one from the beginning of what we call the book of Deuteronomy: the daily prayer that everyone in Jesus' community knew because they said it as they left their house and as they arrived back home. *Love God with your whole heart, with all your soul, your mind, and with all your strength.* In other words, love God with everything you've got. And that was a reminder that people did every morning. They'd often touch the doorpost and say that prayer to themselves that I'm going to love God with my whole heart, mind, and strength. And then Jesus says, "Well, for good measure, I'll give you a second commandment, which we would see coming from the book of Leviticus." And it was a passage about a commandment about not treating people with anger or revenge or anything; it just said *love your neighbor as yourself.* And Jesus said everything falls under that. And I think Jesus was pretty profound in that.

Even with respect to the big 10 here, you know, the first four are loving God with all your heart, mind, and soul. I brought you out of Egypt, God says. Don't pretend there's any other gods. I'm the only one for you. That's part of loving God. Don't make pictures or statues or anything you think looks like me. Don't bow down and pray to a statue. That's a loving God. Be careful how you use my name. If you're going to use my name, mean what you say. Remember the last day of the week. Make it special. Work for six days and rest on the seventh. The big 10 are told twice in the books of the Torah. One time the sabbath commandment is justified in that God took six days to make the world rested on the seventh. And the other one is that you know God brought you out of Egypt and you should honor God that way.

The first four of the big 10 are all about loving God with everything we've got. And then the next six are all about loving neighbors. And I think if they only wanted to post the last six commandments in school or on walls of public buildings, then it might make more sense because that takes religion out of it.

These are just rules for living with each other, loving your neighbor as yourself.

Treat your mother and father with respect. Be good to them. I've spent over 30 years trying to get that one figured out on the parent side. I've spent 60 some years trying to figure it out on the other side. And we know that every relationship with our parents is not always healthy and strong. It's kind of implied here that your mother and father are worthy of the respect that there isn't some kind of broken relationship. Honour those who've come before you because they gave you something that you didn't have on your own.

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Don't kill anyone. Now, some will argue that the Hebrew language is murder. So, don't commit murder. that it's okay to kill if it's not murder. That argument is made with respect to capital punishment or a way to justify killing in war.

Ralph Milton wrote the next one as *don't have sex with anyone you're not married to*. Oo, we used the word sex in church today. I'm not sure that's the best translation of do not commit adultery because adultery isn't just about having sex with someone you're not married to. It's about... if you're married, you shouldn't be having sex with anyone other than your spouse. In the world of the Ten Commandments, this was largely because men were seen to be the property owners of their spouse. And so if someone had had their way with another man's spouse, then that meant that they were somehow infringing on their property rights. But what it really says, if you made a commitment to someone else, you need to honor that commitment. It's, you know, do what you say you promised you're going to do.

Don't steal. That's been a problem in the whole history of humanity.

Don't tell lies about people. Now, in the context of Exodus, it's: don't go to court and tell lies about people. But should it make any difference whether we're in court or not? I mean, the consequences might be stronger if you're in court and you lie about something, but I'm fine with keeping that broader than just don't go to court and bear a false witness against someone. But just don't tell lies.

The last one, don't wish you had things that belong to other people.

All of these last six commandments are part of what Jesus said could be contained in it. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Treat your family with respect.

Treat your spouse with respect. Don't go killing people.

Don't go stealing things. Don't be sitting there always wanting what that other person has because that can lead to the stealing or in worst cases the killing and it's kind of related to the don't commit adultery one as well. The big 10 is just big two as far as Jesus is concerned.

Actually Jesus at another rule that he laid out that we hear it in both Matthew and in Luke that summarizes maybe all of it. *Do to others what you would like them to do to you*. Treat others the way you'd like to be treated. And that golden rule is found across religions. It's found across faith traditions. It's a rule even in non-religious circles. Let's put that on a wall somewhere.

Treat others the way you would like to be treated. How many problems in this world would go away if everybody figured that one out and how to do that? Well, it's not 10 things, it's one thing. Let's treat each other with the love and respect that we all deserve.

Amen.

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