

Overcoming Through True Freedom

September 5, 2021

Overarching Theme: In 2021, FUMC will be SENT with the peace of Christ!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

On Easter evening, the Risen Christ appears to his gathered disciples for the first time since Good Friday and speaks these words: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Just as Jesus sent his disciples into a divided, conflicted 1st Century with his peace, so he sends us into a divided, conflicted 2021 with his peace.

Reflect on this Scripture:

Exodus 20:1-17 NRSV (v.2;8-11 emphasis)

Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods

before me.⁴ 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. ⁵ 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, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.⁷ 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.⁸ **Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.** ⁹ **Six days you shall labor and do all your work.** ¹⁰ **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.** ¹¹ **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.**

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ 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.

This Week: The Book of Exodus, Exodus 20.

The Book of Exodus, the second of the Old Testament, is the story of God's rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt (Ex 1-15), Israel's travels in the wilderness (Ex 16-18) and God's making and restoring a covenant relationship with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai as they begin their journey toward the promise land (Exodus 19 -40).

In the midst of their journey, this fledgling community will soon experience challenges that will form them as a covenant people. How will they provide for themselves? How will the community be structured? What are the boundaries (commandments) for life with God and one another?

In chapter 20, God reveals the stipulations of this covenant in what is commonly known as the 10 commandments, revealed in two tablets. The fourth commandment stands out and is commonly included in the first tablet.

However, because the Sabbath command occupies such a prominent and decisive position in the Decalogue, and because it enjoins rest for humanity as well as honoring God the creator, it serves as a pivotal command that stands between and connects to both tablets.

Unlike most of the other commands (see also v. 12), this one is not a prohibition; rather, it enjoins Israel to positive action. Israel is to remember (zakhar). The act of remembering here, as in the remembering of Holy Communion, means to appropriate actively as a present reality. The seventh day is to be marked as "holy time" – i.e., as time completely devoted to the LORD.

The positive command itself indicates that Sabbath remembrance is in fact a complete and comprehensive work stoppage. The way in which this day is to be acknowledged as holy – i.e., different and special – is to separate it from all days of required activity, productivity, coercive performance, self-securing, or service to other human agents. Moreover, this covenantal work stoppage is not a special privilege of the male believer or land owner. The entire society that makes up the family, village, or clan is to share publicly in this act.

How is it that a covenantal work stoppage bears witness to this self-disclosing God? The answer is given in the motivational clause: Israel rests because God rests. This God is not a workaholic; Yahweh has no need to be more secure, more sufficient, more in control, or more noticed. It is ordained in the very fabric of creation that the world is not a place of endless productivity, ambition, or anxiety. The LORD did not free Israel from Egypt in order for them to be slaves again. God's people are to celebrate their true freedom through living out the 10 commandments, including the 4th - limiting their labors to six days by remembering the Sabbath.

-Adapted from New Interpreters Commentary, Vol 1, pp. 844-845

Questions to Ponder for Accountability in the Group:

1. The book of Exodus reveals God as a liberating God. Humans tend to love freedom, but is it possible to have too much freedom? If so, how can too much freedom be detrimental?
2. The liberating God freed Israel from the limitations of Egyptian slavery, but then God limited their freedom through the giving of the 10 commandments. How do humans tend to respond to imposed limits (i.e. the speed limit)? Even if humans resist limits, how can limits (like the 10 commandments) actually be life-giving?
3. Some scholars believe that the 4th Commandment - *remember the Sabbath* - is pivotal to understanding the Ten as a whole. What might be so significant about a day set aside for rest, renewal and replenishment? How might the experience of Sabbath empower us to be faithful to the other commandments?
4. Instead of remembering the Sabbath, Israel often forgot the Sabbath. Why do you think it was so hard for them (and us) to remember this day of rest?
5. Later, when the Jewish people (and later, Christians) remembered the Sabbath, sometimes the day became more about rules than renewal. How can we, in our 24/7 world, have a more life-giving, renewing Sabbath experience today?

Activity for the Life of a Disciple:

1. Remember to find encouragement for the day by reading the daily devotional from FUMCC and/or gratitude journal.
2. Try taking some "Sabbath" time this week. If it is seemingly impossible to take a day (Labor Day?), how about trying to arrange 2-3 hours just to be and to 'refill your cup'?
3. Ponder and pray on this scripture this week (Exodus 20:2,8-10):
I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;
⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ 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.