

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Adult Bible Studies
Week #15

Exodus 20:1-6

January 23/24, 2024

Guest Teacher: The Rev. Dr. Jerry Andrews

Covenanting on the Mountain – Exodus 19-20

Lately we have learned (chapters 17 and 18):

They are reliant on God for food (manna and quail) and water (Marah and Rephidim),
yet they argue with and against Moses.

They are reliant on God for protection (Amalekites attack),
yet it is Moses' raised hands and Joshua's sword that wins the victory.

They are reliant on God for justice (the Jethro story);
Moses cannot do it alone.

It is now 90/60 days after Egypt (chapters 19 and 20).

We have witnessed the inadequacy of the people to be self-governing,
and of the leadership to be salvific.

The weakness of reason and effort alone are manifest.

There are limits - corporate and individual to resolving political, social, relational issues
[Nietzsche: 'might makes right or least makes sense', describes Egypt and Pharaoh]

Hence: The necessity of revelation - a word from God.

We are on the threshold of the central event. Exodus 19:3-6 has heightened – poetic - language.

'house of Jacob' only time spoken in the Torah

Mayflower Compact 1620 – sworn to before God by the pilgrims arriving at Plymouth, Massachusetts.

The first American political document is a covenant/lay sermon which announces
the terms of obedience to God's word and goodness toward each other – 'a city set on a hill'.

'A Kingdom of Priests'

A king is profane, secular (think Pharaoh)

But this nation is to become a kingdom of priests (religious, sacred); no king is mentioned.

Everyone a priest w/in nation: everyone has access to God, makes sacrifice, honors the covenant

Priests act only after the (priestly) people come, through daily, morning and evening, sacrifices

Very very few sacrifices solicited by God so far in Genesis and Exodus;

But now a nation where (sacrificing) priests rule – theocracy.

The one nation is to become 'Priest' to the nations.

A priest to the nations showing/living the good and godly life.

God extending grace to all b/c of Israel. This is the original promise to Abraham.

'A Holy Nation'

Separated out to God - 'You will be my treasured possession'.

Separated out from the nations – not like the others – neither Egyptian nor Canaanite.

Separated out to and from, for others - blessed to be a blessing.

The vertical prior to the horizontal – love God (1st) and neighbor (necessarily next).

'Holy' Gadosh 'holy' not in Genesis – only 5 previous times in Exodus – no one 'holy' ...yet.

Holiness is a work of election.

Though the whole world belongs to the LORD (creation) it is not called 'holy' (election).

Less than the whole is made holy for the sake of the whole world

So a covenant. Covenanting is as decisive as the contents of the covenant.

The people all agree to what the LORD has said, but not yet to what the LORD will say.

A conditional 'if', but not rewards so much as results.

A people is formed (re-formed) - the Hebrew 'am', among the 'ammin'.

We are not a people until in covenant together with God

So God speaks a 'word' – 10 exactly - called 'words' (not 'commandments').

God invites Moses up, but keeps strict boundaries between himself and the people – not their word, his alone.

Now they will hear God speak to Moses and they will obey Moses.

The LORD descends to the top of Mt Sinai

Shifting/shuttling, disorientation, confusion – people willingly 'stay at a distance'.

Lighting, thunder, thick cloud [= volcano?]

An irruption into our world – not reason but revelation – a 'word' from beyond.

A preamble – summary – bold headline.

Who I am to you – 'the Lord your God';

What I have done for you – 'brought you up out of Egypt';

Why I have done this – 'out of the land of slavery'.

These words (re-)establish them as a freed/free people. Not just freed from, but freed for ...

The First Word: 'No other'.

How not to seek God, no others, an exclusive intimate relationship, 'I-Thou', practical cultural monotheism.

We do not raise anyone, anything up to the level of God: no thing 'before'/'beside' me.

The Second Word: 'No image'.

To worship what is unworthy of worship demeans the worshipper.

We do not lower God to any other level. Jealous for the truth to be known – his glory.

Iniquity lasts to 3rd and 4th generation; grace is for 1000 generations (my Viking/Scot grandmother).

The Third Word: 'No Emptiness'

Neither worshipper nor the one worshipped is hollow.

We do not speak emptily, frivolously, insincerely, contemptuously of/for God.

Thinking God is on our side – at oath swearing - not speaking about, but heeding the speech of...

The Ten 'words': 'I, the LORD' are the first words. 'Your neighbor' the last.

More 'lo' = more restraint than encouragement

Two great sins according to the Reformed: Idolatry and Tyranny; offense against God and neighbor.

Genesis would read differently if 10 'words' in place

Moses wants God's presence and authority People want God's absence and Moses' authority

Fearful 'they stayed at a distance'. The fear of the LORD will help keep them from sinning

This is a God not to be trifled with. Now the people are able and authorized to put away false gods.

[Questions for Meditation and Discussion: what the Westminster Catechism teaches as duty and restriction.]