

Year A – Proper 22 “A Rule of Life”

“The Law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul” (Psalm 19:7)

How do you measure things? Well, it depends on what you’re measuring. You might use a ruler or an odometer for distance. You might use a scale for weight. You might time how long it takes you to do something. You might use a subjective idea that is common in the culture – such as “thin is beautiful” to measure a person’s body. Or you might have goals that you can measure your progress against. There are all kinds of ways that we measure things, keep track of them, assess how we’re doing.

Today’s reading from Exodus is one that we should know by heart but most of us have forgotten it by rote memory. Fortunately, we know the “back story” well because it is one of the core stories that we all heard if we attended Sunday School. And it’s the story we’ve been following in the Book of Exodus since mid-August. It’s the story of Moses. I don’t know about you but my version of that story is serious influenced by Cecil B. DeMille’s movie *“The Ten Commandments”*. And of course, that’s our reading for today. After much traveling in the wilderness, Moses is given The ten Commandments by the voice of God at the top of Mount Sinai. And Moses communicates these words from God to the people. And it is later that the words are written on stone for the people.

If you look at page 350 in the Book of Common Prayer you will see a succinct and to the point listing of the Ten Commandments. Notice they are called commandments not requests or guidelines. They are an essential part of the covenant that God has made with God’s people. They are, as psalm 19 says, laws.

As laws, they have an effect when we don’t follow them. Now, if you don’t follow the laws of the road, what happens to you? Well, you might get a ticket and have to pay a huge fine. But, ultimately, you might die. The laws are there to provide boundaries for our driving behavior that will keep us safe and allow everyone to journey from one place to another.

What happens if you defy the law of gravity? Not good things.

The same is true of God’s laws. What happens when you violate them? Well, you might have real trouble in your life, but you also fall away from living a life that is centered on God. Think of some folks you know who might not honor their parents, who might not have a weekly day of Sabbath, who might covet what everyone else has. How’s that working for them? They might not be the happiest people you know. They might always be struggling.

These laws/commandments were the ones that Jesus grew up with. They are summed up by him: *Love God and Love your neighbor as yourself*. The commandments tell us how we are to do that.

God’s laws are meant to be a gift – a way to journey through life that keeps us on the path of life instead of death. When we violate them in any way – we violate ourselves and the intention of the fullness of life that God has given us. But wait-there’s more to it than that!

The Gospel today shows what happens when there is total disregard for God's commandments. It all goes awry. Murder and mayhem thrives as the tenants plot to own the vineyard instead of just caring for it as they have been instructed. (Isn't that what we have done with the earth? Think about how we talk about our piece of the planet as if we owned it? Or our children as if we own them? Or our animals as if we own them?) The result in this story is not good. The reign of God is taken away because of our rejection of it – not because God does not want us to live in the kingdom. By straying from the laws we take ourselves out of the kingdom.

Rules, laws, and yes, even guidelines are meant to keep us on the path of what the Jewish people call "righteousness" – that is right relation with God. But the "stone which we reject" becomes the grist for God's redemption. When we trip over the stone, when we fail and can see our failure, we are picked up and set back on the path of life and wholeness.

Having a measuring rod is really helpful. Most of us don't spend a lot of time thinking about the Ten Commandments. We know the essentials and hopefully, following them is built into our life.

But there is a way to assure that. It's called establishing your own "Rule of Life". Setting guidelines for how you will live out these laws. For some folks in this face paced life, it's impossible to observe a Sabbath day once a week, but they have a rule which begins with once a month – a full day, no work, just rest, reflection and being in the presence of God. Others will take a week of retreat to do that every couple of months.

Some folks include in their rule of life a simplifying of life. They get rid of extraneous possessions, decrease their involvement in so many things, set priorities and spend each day on those.

Some people have a time for prayer each day and a way that they eat that sustains good health and fosters a healthy planet.

There are many ways to take the gift of these laws and convert them into concrete applications for our own lives.

That's the invitation today. Establish a rule for your own life. Let it flow from your relationship with God. Consider how these laws, expressed as ten Commandments or as the law of love as Jesus sums them up, give you life and direction for your life.

Let your rule of life be your guide and God be at the center of it because:

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Amen.

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