

Series: Ten Commandments  
Sermon: #1, One God

## *1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: No Other gods*

### Deuteronomy 6: 1-9

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

### Exodus 20:1-3

And God spoke all these words: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.

Around 20 years after our church began, the state I grew up in, Nebraska, became a state. I'm going to bore you with a little history that has probably doesn't mean much to you, but it makes me laugh. The new capital was in Omaha, but there was a political movement to move it away from there. So the very first governor of Nebraska, Mr. David Butler, went with a couple of friends on a fact-finding expedition to other parts of the state. There were several prominent spots. In the booming town of Yankee Hill, hundreds came out for an ice cream social to welcome the dignitaries - to rally support for their town. It seemed locked in the bag. On the way back to Omaha, the three-man committee stopped in the sleepy town of Lancaster, along the banks of a salty creek in the middle of nowhere. Only a few people came out to greet them. The town was having a hard time selling plots of land, it seemed that Lancaster didn't have a very good water supply, it came out, well, salty. That's what happens when you build along Salt Creek. But they had a nice carrot to offer them. The Methodist Church had tried to start a school of higher learning in Lancaster, and because of the lack of people, it was going bust. They offered the school building and adjoining land to the Capital Commission free of charge - they could move in immediately. When they got home, Governor Butler weighed his options carefully, a highly populated area with promise, or a struggling village desperate to make it. Before he made his official decision known, he secretly bought up many cheap plots of land in the town of Lancaster - something he couldn't do in Yankee Hill. Of course, he made Lancaster the Capital, and then sold the land he had recently purchased to the State of Nebraska for a handsome profit. Can you say, "Corruption?" The State, in turn, used the land to lure businesses and enterprises to Lancaster, (which changed its name to Lincoln, after the just fallen President) who gobbled up the land so the state made a nice profit as well. Governor Butler, who oversaw the finances of the state, used those

proceeds to give his intimate friends “loans”, most of whom never paid back. If you think politics is scummy now, you should have seen it in the olden days. Because of these irregularities, Governor Butler was brought up on charges, and of all the states, Nebraska has the only distinction of impeaching its very first Governor, David Butler.

He broke a law. Actually, he broke a lot of laws. And he paid the price. And it's this morning that we're going to talk about Laws. There are many laws that we have to follow. Many codes of conduct. If you have a license, here is the rule book for those who drive. If you want to build a house, here is the building codes that you have to follow. Rules, or you don't build a house. I'm sure in many of your places of work, you have an employee handbook that states what you can and cannot do. I've seen some 10 to 75 pages long. If you've bought a house, how many pages do you have to sign to transfer home ownership from one person to another? A while back, I saw the president sign a treaty with another country about trade agreements. Billions, if not trillions of dollars will change hands. And he made one signature. I want to get a Costco card, I have to sign here, sign here, initial here, and again, sign at the bottom. It doesn't make sense! We live by laws, with agreements, with contracts, with covenants, with Homeowner Association rules, with rules of the road, and on and on and on. Our lives are dictated by the principles of law and order in so many ways. And yet I find it interesting that we have, from our Judea-Christian traditions, 10 rules to live by, but most of us can't name them. As a Congregation, could we come up with the Ten Commandments? 1) You shall have no other gods but me. 2) No idols 3) No name in Vain. 4) Remember the Sabbath. 5) Honor ma and pa. 6) No adultery. 7) No lying. 8) No stealing. 9) No murder 10) No coveting. Good job. We have 500 pages of codes if we want to build a home. But God only gives us 10 Commandments to live by. There's actually more, but these are the big ones.

And you remember how we got these Ten Commandments. Moses was out in the desert one day with his flock and he had received a calling, from a burning bush, to go and free the Hebrew slaves in Egypt. After said freeing, he was to bring them back to this mountain and await further instructions. The mountain was called Mt. Siniah, or Mt. Horeb, depending on who you talk to. So Moses went and freed the Hebrews and brought them back to the Mountain. There's more to it than what we read this morning, but in the end, Moses went up on the Mountain and God gave him the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets. This is God's contract with the people of Israel. The first copy God took made the commandments, maybe with lightning and fire was portrayed in the Ten Commandments with Charlton Heston. The second tablet Moses had to do himself - that might be in next week's story. And we like to think of the two stone tablets, with five on this side and five on the other side. But there is a theory that it probably had Ten on this side and ten on the other side - two identical tablets, where it was a contract between God and his people. And each party got a copy. Because that is what this Law is saying. If you want to be my people, if you want me to be your God, then these are your obligations to follow. I will hold up my end of the bargain if you hold up yours. This was very much like a treaty being signed. It even opens up like a contract where everyone identifies themselves. You know when you buy a car, “Purchaser (Michael Benischek) agree to purchase a 2018 Mazda Miata” [I wish] from Seller “Mazda of Gladstone”. Ten Commandments the same way. This is how it opens: “And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.’” I, Lord you God. You, who were in Egypt. And the Commandments set forth after that are the stipulations that “the people who were in Egypt” have to follow if they want God to continue with them. It was a contract, a covenant, and this morning, we will take a quick look at the First Commandment. “You shall have no other gods before me.”

It seems like such an easy commandment. No other gods. Makes sense to us, because we don't believe in other gods but one. What kind of numbskull would believe in more than one God? We think to ourselves. But lets remember who God was dealing with. These are the people of Israel. Slaves. From Egypt. And in Egypt, and throughout the Mediterranean, and indeed the rest of the world, you had polytheism, many gods. In Egypt, you had dozens of gods. Isis, the god of earth, Ra, the god of the sun, Anubis, the god of the dead. And many others. Greece had their gods, Zeus, Athena, Hermes. Rome had theirs, Jupiter, Mercury, Apollo, Mars, Vulcan.

Northern Europe had their Nordic gods: Frig, Loki Thor, Oden to name a few. You had a choice as to your religious affiliations. And here, at the birthplace of Judaism, we have the first notion of a single God. “Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” Who is worthy of worship? Only one. Who is it that we pray to? Only one. Who is it that we put our trust and our faith in? Only one. But Pastor Mike, Don’t all religions really believe in the same thing?, I hear you ask. No, not really. That’s one of my pet peeve statements by the way. All religions end up in the same place. We, as Christians, believe that God is one, and that Jesus Christ came to fix our relationship with God. And with others. Love God, love neighbor. How many other religions can say that? Buddhists want to leave the world, experience Nirvana, which is nothingness. They believe that the world is bad and they should escape it. On the contrary, we believe that God made the world. To quote Genesis, “And God made the earth and the heavens and He was pleased with what He had made and he called it “GOOD”. Hindus, what do they seek? Hindues have 330 million gods. Not joking. Although I’m not sure who counted them. Their goal is to reach a Dharma. Complete independence from everything. No contact or relationship with anything. Totally isolated away from the world, creation, family, god. Totally opposite from what we know God to be - our God is a relational God. He wants us to be with him. That’s why he sent Jesus in the first place. You can do this kind of thing with every other religion out there. Confucionism, Shinto, you name it. Don’t ask me about Scientology, I have no idea what they believe. We believe in one God, who was revealed through Jesus Christ, and we live through the Spirit, and we live by Christian virtues, such as kindness, mercy, humility, charity, faithfulness, hope, and most of all love. What God cares about is His people. He has promises of faithfulness and peace and forgiveness and hope and joy for those who follow his commands. His people are His concern. And His people are those who takes this covenant seriously.

This is what I want you to leave with this morning: God gave his People the Ten Commandments, not because he is a cosmic killjoy who wants to micro manage everything we do, but because he loves us. These are rules that keep us out of trouble. I remember when our kids were younger, we had a rule that they had to follow, you cannot go past the sidewalk into the street. One step off the sidewalk, you get busted. This grass, good. That small strip of grass, bud. Are we cruel parents? No! We love our children enough to set up boundaries. And we’re tired of having to put urgent care into our monthly budget. Life is better that we don’t have murder, stealing, lying, etc. We have it, but it isn’t supposed to be there, and it isn’t too common. If it was legal, look out! We worship one God. And this God loves us more than we can imagine. For the next 10 weeks, we will look at each of his commandments in turn, and I think you will be surprised by what we’ll discover. There is more to each of these that you think. Next week, we’ll take a look at Idols, using the story of the Golden Calf. Beef, its whats for worship.