

SERMON
 First Lutheran Church
 Aitkin, Minnesota

Exodus 19:1-6, 20:1-2
 Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
 May 27, 2018

KIDS' MESSAGE

"We are your parents!" Have you kids ever heard that before? **"We are your parents."** What do your parents say about crossing the **street**? (Look both ways...) **Car seats/seat belts**? (Buckle up and live...) **Apples**? (An apple a day...) **Carrots**? (Helps your vision...) **Television/computer/I-Pad**? (Turn the x off and go out and play...) **Smoking**? (Don't smoke – cancer...) **Lying**? (Your nose will grow like Pinocchio...) **Guns**? (Don't play with guns...)

Do they say these things **because** they **don't like you, want to make you sick, want to make you suffer**??? No, they say these things because they are your parents and they love you. They want to keep you safe, help you to grow strong, healthy and smart, want you to have a good life...

God told God's children, the people of Israel, **"I am the Lord your God."** God didn't say this because he **didn't like** them, wanted to **make them sick** or wanted to **make them suffer**. God promised that God was their **loving parent** and would always be there to help and keep them safe. God saved them from a really tough time when they were slaves in Egypt. Then God said, trust me to walk with you and to help you. God promised to love and care for them all the time.

Kids, your parents make that loving and caring promise to you. So does God. Your parents say, **"We are your parents."** God says, **"I am the Lord your God."** Today we thank God for giving us our parents. And we thank God for giving us Godself. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

Tell the people, **“I am the Lord your God.”** Thousands of years ago, those words carried tremendous promise to the people of Israel. Today we start a series of sermons focused on the **Ten Commandments**. Our text recounts a stop along the way for God’s people, Israel. God, using Moses, has just delivered them from **slavery** in **Egypt** and is bringing them to a new and wonderful land in **Palestine**. They stop at Mount Sinai and God speaks to Moses. Tell the people, **“I am the Lord your God.”** Coming with God’s statement are a host of memories and gifts. **“I am the God who created you, rescued you from slavery, wrapped you in my embrace and who journeys through life with you. I am the God who is bringing you to the Promised Land. I commit myself to be your God and to love and care for you every day, in every way, and forever.”**

Before God asked one thing of his chosen people, **God gifted them** again and again.

- Not only did God rescue them from slavery. Then God **journeyed** with them – **“I bore you on eagles’ wings.”**
- Then God **brought them home** – **“I brought you to myself.”**
- God gave them an **identity**, not just former slaves, but children of God – **“I am the Lord your God.”**
- In addition, God gave those ancient people of God the **promise** – **“You shall be my treasured possession, a priestly, holy nation.”** – God blessed them, just like Abraham and Sarah, to be a **channel of blessing** to all nations.

God was their **help**, their **hope**, their **home** and their **future**, as they headed into a new day.

Finally, **after presenting** all of these **priceless gifts** to God’s people, God invites them to **respond**. **“Obey my voice”** and **“Keep my covenant.”** Or, **“Listen to me”** and **do your small part to grow in** the **life-giving relationship** that I have created for you to enjoy and to share with me.

There you have it. This is the **ancient, yet contemporary story** of how God has moved mightily to **create, rescue, bring home**, give **identity** and **promise** to God's beloved people, **Israel** and to **you** and **me**. **Blessed to be a blessing**. . .

"I am the Lord your God." How do **you hear** these words today? **Promise?** I hear, **"I am the Lord your God, who:**

- **Dreamt** you up.
- **Created** you in your mother's womb.
- **Loves** you with all of my heart.
- **Died** on a cross to **rescue** you from sin and death.
- Daily **provides** for you.
- Will **never give up** on you or let you go.
- Invites you to **walk with Jesus in mission** to **love and care for this world**.

I don't know about you, but I was **born in the promised land** – the **United States of America**. **I was raised** by people who loved and trusted God with their lives. I have **known countless blessings** of family, friends, faith family, community, state and country. I have **seen and experienced** amazing beauty in the creation around me, amazing freedom in the nation I had the good fortune to be born in, amazing opportunity from the upbringing and education I have known, more than sufficient resources for shelter, food and clothing. . . **God has gifted** all of this to me. I **don't deserve** these things, **didn't earn** them, and will **only have them for the short time** that **God gives me** to live on this earth.

Israel was about to enter a new, promised **land of life, freedom and prosperity**. That's where I live too. **Everything** they had **came** to them from the **generous and gracious hand of God**. That's my story too. Long ago, God claimed as God's own a two-bit shepherd people, a bunch of former slaves. Then God blessed and empowered them to be the **hands and feet of God** in this big, wide world. God gave them everything they needed for life and joy. They just **needed to remember where they came from** and **whom it was that marched into the future with them**. **"I am the Lord your God."** Here in the U.S., we need to remember that too.

Almost 250 years ago, some colonists from Europe made a giant step forward. They decided that they were tired of being dominated by a distant king and a small, but powerful, group of aristocracy. They claimed some lofty principles like freedom and justice for all. They put together a revolutionary dream - "government of the people, by the people, and for the people" as popularized in Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. They went from being voiceless vassals of a powerful few to being citizens of a nation where every person eventually was granted the freedom of speech and vote.

Today, in this great land of opportunity for all, the lower class is growing rapidly. The middle class is shrinking rapidly. And the upper class, especially the top 2% is controlling obscene percentages of the nation's and of the world's power and resources. Money elects our leaders. Why is it that millions of dollars pour into northeastern Minnesota to influence who we elect to be our 8th District Congressional Representative? I believe, in the last election, our district received the second highest amount of campaign money in the whole nation. Expensive campaign ads can say almost anything they want. I read on Facebook prior to our last presidential election that Hillary Clinton killed six FBI agents. I didn't believe it, but how many others did. How will this election be any different from the last one? We are persuaded that powerful, wealthy individuals care about justice, opportunity for all and the well-being of the "little guy" when they are running for office. Then their actions reveal the very opposite once they are elected. Our elected leaders need to pay tribute to their financial supporters rather than seek the best common good. And those in power, often regardless of whether they are Republicans or Democrats, lead the middle and lower classes and the various races to demonize and battle it out against each other over single interest issues while more and more power and wealth comes under the control of the powerful few.

On this Memorial Day weekend, we remember, thank and celebrate all of those people who sacrificed their very lives "for God and for country." We celebrate the fact that they helped to keep the United States a "free country with justice and liberty for all." Are we letting everything slip away that they fought and died to win and keep for us as Americans? Does truth no longer hold sway? Honor? Respect? Civil debate? Powerful interests keep our leaders from working out

compromises to move forward for the **good of the people**. Compromise used to be a hallmark of democracy.

Who is running this country? What role do we, as the little person, have in the future of the United States as a democratic nation? **Who will help us?** **"I am the Lord your God."** **"I am the Lord your God."** **"I am the Lord your God."** God gave this promise to the descendants of Abraham, which includes the **Jews**, the **Muslims** and the **Christians**.

God created us. God journeys with us through life. God bestows everything upon us necessary for survival and even abundant life. God rescues us from sin, death and the power of evil. Lamb's blood has been shed again, Jesus' blood. God brings us home to live with God here and forever. God promises that we **"shall be God's treasured possession, a priestly, holy nation."** This isn't spoken to the **United States of America**. This is spoken to the **people of God**. Are you a child of God? And after giving us everything we need, God says, **"obey my voice"** and **"keep my covenant."** Or, **"listen to me"** and **"do your part"** to **grow in the love/trust relationship** that I have invited you to share with me.

Are **our leaders** listening to God? Are **we** listening to God? God made a promise to the people of Israel centuries ago. God makes the same promise to us today.

"I am the Lord your God." Amazing promise for you and me. God's promise, **"I'm here for you and for the world. Do the right thing, in your home, work place, church, community and country. I will be with you. I will help you."** **There is hope.** Thanks be to God. Amen.