

*Texts: Deut. 5:1-21, 6:4-9; Mark 12:28-31*

*Subject: Hear O Israel*

*Theme: He's Got This*

Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost; Oct. 06, 2019, Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV

Grace and peace to you from God our father in heaven and the Lord Jesus,  
Amen.

Our memories are fascinating. Maybe there is a song that makes you remember how you felt some October morning and who you were with so many years ago. Maybe the smell of pumpkin spice brings up deep memories of a family gathering or a fall festival - or a trip to the Starbucks drive thru! If that's your thing, go for it. Some people have something like a photographic memory - it's not really *photographic* - but eidetic memory - where people can continue to "see:" an image after only glancing at it a few seconds. Most of us though, are a forgetful bunch. We need to hear something over and over again. We need to get our muscles to remember a motion, or repeat a song over and over again to learn the lyrics.

If you want to learn something you must practice. Practice makes - not perfect - progress. When I wanted to learn to play the guitar, I took a couple of lessons, and mostly found the songs I wanted to learn in guitar magazines and played them every single day. Okay, I usually didn't learn the whole song, but I'd pick up pieces, and play them over and over again. My dad was the first one to teach me to play the songs he knew. There was one little riff he taught me, that incorporates a fundamental technique (it's called a hammer-on). I played that same riff over and over again for years. I never knew where it came from. I didn't know the song. It was almost twenty years later, while working at a radio station in Los Angeles, that I heard that riff that was burned into my memory, on Little Steven's Underground Garage - a rock show the station used to air on

Saturday or Sunday nights. I don't remember the name of it now - but it was clearly the song i had been playing all those years. It never left me. I don't practice guitar anymore like I used to, so I tend to forget a lot of the songs I used to know, but put the music in front of me, and I can follow along, most of the time.

In Deuteronomy, Moses gives a series of messages to the people before they are to enter into the promised land. We hear Moses repeat the law handed down from God - the ten words - the decalogue - the ten commandments. Like the sheet music to a song they've forgotten, he reminds the people what God has asked of them, that they would continue to be in relationship with the God of their ancestors. That's right this is a new group - a new assembly - the ancestors of those ones who lived in slavery in Egypt - they wandered for 40 years in the desert, and heard these commandments before, but they were frustrated or forgetful, and rebelled. Now these, their children, the next generation, are getting ready to go into a new place - yes that *already* has people in it - that worship other gods, that live differently. Could this be a primer on living as God's people in a new place, a contrast community in a new culture? Could be. But more than that it is a reminder of God's promise to be their God, and encouragement to hold true to the deep relationship and salvation God offers.

Moses gives them the law - the way to live in freedom as God's people. They were no longer slaves, no longer forced to serve any other master but the Lord their God. They were facing a massive change that no doubt held excitement, but fear as well. They would not be a wandering people any more - they would have a homeland. They might have been wondering, how are we supposed to live now? So Moses

reminds them - he tells the story for them again - he gives them the Ten Commandments.

*The Lord is the only God. Do not treat the Lord's name as a curse. Don't work every day of the week - like you did in Egypt. Take time for rest and worship. Care for the ones who care for you. Don't kill, cheat, steal, or lie. Don't work to take away what belongs to your neighbor.*

Moses reminded all the people of what living in freedom looks like. They needed to hear it again. and again. and again. He reminds them who they are. They belong to God, and *God's got this.*

Rolf Jacobsen notes that this is a word given not just to the second generation after Egypt, but for the next one and the next one, and for each one of us too. The text in Hebrew includes the repetition for emphasis - "Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with *us*, who are *all of us - here - alive - today.*" This is God's Word of love and relationship and freedom. If we only hear the ten commandments as limits, we're missing part of the picture. Relationships have boundaries. Boundaries are good. These boundaries tell us how to be in relationship with God, and how to care for one another.

Left to our own devices, we will forget, we will forge ahead with our own plans, our works, some intended for good, some not - and we will fall again and again. We will break every command, love ourselves most and first, and at the expense of others. Don't believe me? It's our story. It's our history. We do it again and again. We don't like rules - that might be part of it - human beings don't like limits. We'd rather do what we want to do and to fulfill our own needs and desires first and often.

Moses continues with the words of the Shema - this powerful reminder of who God is and includes the commands to love the Lord with all their heart and soul and might. This central verse in Judaism is still repeated by observant Jewish families twice per day, and in Orthodox practice, strapped to the foreheads and arms of people (phylacteries). This very verse is posted in boxes pinned to doorposts (mezuzahs), as blessings and reminders of the power of God's Word.

Every night my children say the same prayers before bed. I remind them that they can pray any way they want to, but after saying the same prayer for so many years, it's the way they're most comfortable talking to God. Many of us have tried to teach our children the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments the same way - repetition. If we want God's word to stick with us as we grow, we need to hear it again and again. It's not a bad thing at all. Most of us do tend to fall out of practice from time to time. It's not such a bad thing to recommit - to challenge ourselves to read the Bible a little more, to engage with scripture regularly, to enter into the story of God as a daily practice that it would be in our minds and close to our hearts.

We need to be reminded of who *we* are as well.

We get this reminder as we come to worship, where we confess the ways we've fallen short of the law, and hear the promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord. We hear the good news that we are not condemned but rescued from bondage too, because of Jesus - *He's got this!* We hear that we are freed from bondage to sin, to selfishness, to self worship, to fear and to death. We are reminded of our freedom to love God and love one another to share the heart of Christ in the heart of the city and everywhere we go. It's not what we do, but what Jesus is doing in us.

*Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one.*

This good news communicates first and foremost God's power - God's sovereignty. It also notes the the relationship between God and God's people - *Our* God is the Lord - and it is the answer to the question Jesus gives when asked by the scribe - "Which commandment is the greatest?" Spoiler alert: Jesus is a Jew. Jesus knows the law. This question poses no problem for him. *He's got this.* He then goes on to distill and expand the law of caring for not only the immediate family, not only the Jewish neighbor, but for *every neighbor*. Love your neighbor as yourself. This all inclusive command is the *unlimited* love of God, grace *unbounded* for all - given through the living Word, Jesus Christ. This is good news not just for the scribe, not just for the Jewish people, but for each one of us.

Love God, love neighbor.

Practice it. Say it over and over again. Remind one another.

Teach children, tell a friend.

Because faith is hard at times. It's difficult to always put God first. We are who we are - sinners in need of a savior - a forgetful people, a broken people, sheep that go missing from time to time. When we see the limits we see where we've strayed. We give up, on God, on ourselves, on each other.

God has not given up on us. God has not given up on you. Be reminded, that we are ones called, commanded, inspired to love God, and love our neighbors.

God doesn't work with perfect circumstances. Jesus doesn't just show up for a perfect people. *He's got this.* This church is one that is making a difference. That you are here, means that someone else gets to come and eat. That you show up and

participate in the ministry here means a family might have a place to sleep for a night. That you come and sing century-old hymns means that someone else's faith is uplifted, someone is encouraged to carry on, to find strength in their time of need. That you come to this table and receive the body and blood of Jesus might feel like just an old habit at times, but one day, some day, you might find He's been transforming you.

We don't get this right all the time. And there are consequences. They hurt. We feel that pain that comes from broken relationships. We may carry that cross a while. Just know that when we fail, we will be reminded again. We will be welcomed back into God's mercy and grace, through the love of Jesus, the ever present, living and active Word of God. And Jesus is always coming to you, through the Word, showing up to remind you who you are: not perfect, but loved and beloved. Righteous. Enough.

Whole. Holy.

Amen.