

So are you ready for a quick review of the major themes in The Story that we've covered so far? Anybody miss a Sunday and want to get filled in? Sound good?

Here's the first theme: God created the heavens and the earth.  
God created all things. And out of everything God made, we are the crown of His creation.

So, we had the Creation, and then we had the Fall. The second theme is the Fall.  
Adam and Eve started a cycle of disobedience called sin.  
Sin separates us from God, because when we sin, we're essentially telling God to get lost, that we don't need Him. We can do just fine on our own.

And sometimes we come to our senses and realize that we've fallen, and we're ashamed. And like Adam and Eve, we try to hide like they did in the Garden.

Cain fell when he killed his brother Abel.  
Noah, was faithful but then after the flood, Noah forgot God's faithfulness, got drunk, and embarrassed his children.

Abraham and Sarah, trusted God, but they also had doubts, and tried to produce an heir, by concocting their own plan. Later Jacob tried to get ahead by tricking his father.

But time and time again, even though we are fallen, God pursues his people in love.  
And that's the next major theme: God pursues his people in love.  
Creation, Fall, then God pursues us in love.

In the Old Testament, we see God's anger when people sin, but we also see God's patient and steadfast love.

God pursued Adam and Eve in the garden,  
he called out to them when they were hiding and brought them back into relationship with Him. God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah, and even in their old age they had a son.

God pursued Jacob, wrestling with him, and giving him a new name Israel.  
And then God protected Israel/ Jacob and his sons, during a great famine.

And even though Joseph's brothers meant to harm him,  
we are told that God used it for good to protect his people.  
He kept his covenant promises to Abraham, and to Isaac and Jacob.

So this brings us to theme # 4: God always keeps his promises. All the way through Scripture, God always keeps his promises.

Then last week, we had the story of the Exodus. The story of God delivering the people of Israel from captivity.

And we heard that the Exodus is the central story of the Old Testament. It's a powerful story. It's the story of God leading his people out of slavery into freedom, into a new life, into the promised land.

And it's a foreshadowing of what God ultimately did through Jesus, when he brought us out of the slavery of sin, into the freedom of life in Him.

And this story of the Exodus becomes a big story in the life of God's people. It still is.

And as we pay attention to God's story, we continue to see the connecting points between God's story and our story.

And even back then God began telling his story, to help them remember the story.

When God spoke to Moses, he said,

"Moses, remember who I am, I am the God of Abraham, and remember what I did for Abraham and Sarah? I blessed them and made them parents of a great nation. I kept that promise."

And throughout the Old Testament you will hear God say,

"I'm the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. I'm the God who will deliver you.

"I'm the God who brought you out of Egypt. I brought you out of slavery."

And even today, God says to us:

"This is my story. You know me by my story. You identify me by these stories."

And so in today's story God says to us, "This is my story. This is how you will know me. This is how you will identify who I am."

So in today's story we learn something new about God. We learn something new about **God's** identity and we learn something new about **our** identity.

Through the Exodus God saved His people.

But He didn't just save them for no particular reason. God saved them for a **purpose**.

On the very first page of Chapter 5, I want to share with what that purpose was, why God saved his people and brought them out of Egypt.

While they were camped in the desert at the base of Mount Sinai: it says,

"Then Moses went up to God, and Lord called to him from the mountain and said: This is what you are to say to the chosen descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel. You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, how I carried you on

eagle's wings, and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my commandment, then out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

So, right at the end there, did you hear why God saved His people?  
Did you hear the purpose God gave them?

He made a covenant with them, right?  
And a covenant is a promise, it's a commitment, it's a pledge.  
And it was a Divine covenant, God's covenant with his people.  
God made a promise to them, and his promise was to give them this mission, this purpose, to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

So what does that mean?  
It meant that out of all the nations of the whole world they were called, they were set apart, that's what it means to be holy.

They were blessed to be a blessing.  
Isaiah 49 states this purpose very clearly:  
God says: I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,  
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

So how did God set about to accomplish this purpose?  
How did he work that purpose out in the people of Israel,  
and how does he work that purpose out today, in your life and mine?

First of all, as they were gathered in the camps at the base of Mount Sinai  
God required His people to consecrate themselves, to prepare themselves to meet him.

Now that's something, we are called to do every single Sunday morning.  
We consecrate this day as a holy day, a day set apart for worship.  
And when we come here, we prepare to meet God.

Now, the Israelites were called to be different than all the nations surrounding them.  
the nations surrounding them were known for all kinds of immorality and they worshipped  
gods made with human hands, gods made of metal or wood.

Well on Sunday morning when you roll out of our driveway, or down the street,  
do you see the street crowded with cars rushing to worship?

No?  
Well then, we are a lot like the Israelites. Because we are called to be different.  
We are called to consecrate this day.

We are called to worship the one true God, not gods made of metal.  
And today when I think of gods made of metal I think of luxury cars, or luxury houses made of wood, things that people can idolize.

Not that having something nice is bad, but what ultimately do we do? Do we worship the things that we have? Or do we put God first?

Well the amazing thing is: God does meet us here.  
When He spoke to Moses the whole mountain trembled.

And believe me, when God speaks to us, and he speaks to your heart, your heart has reason to tremble because it's the God who created the whole universe who is speaking to us.

God's power is just as real today, as it was to the Israelites.  
And God's presence is just as real today.

As Lutherans we teach that God speaks to us through His Word, through Scripture, and in Scripture God speaks to us through Law and Gospel.

And so today we have the 10 Commandments, we have this covenant of law that God made with his people. And some people look at this at a superficial level and see the 10 Commandments as just a list of rules. Things that we should do. Things that we feel bad about if we don't do. And some people think that that is what church is. That it's a place where you go, and God judges you, and makes you feel guilty. and that the Law just proves God doesn't want us to have any fun.

But nothing could be further from the truth.  
The Law, the 10 Commandments were given as a gift.

Just like a loving parent sets boundaries out of love for their children.  
Life without boundaries is not fun. Life without any boundaries at all would be complete chaos.

When I was preparing for this sermon, I watched a sermon from a pastor who invited a member of his congregation, who happened to be a major league umpire, to come and speak on a Sunday morning. And he asked the umpire what baseball would be like if there weren't any rules. And he said, "It would be complete chaos. All the fun in the game would be gone. It would be like kids on the playground trying to play a game with different sets of rules, and arguing about who had a better set of rules."

A relationship without any expectations is not a loving relationship.  
Remember the covenant God made with Israel?  
Remember the purpose He gave them?

He called them to be set apart, to be holy, to be a blessing and a light to all nations. And that's what happens when we keep God's commandments.

Now I want you to just take a moment, and think of a person of faith you look up to and really admire. When you think about that person you probably think about the blessing they have been to many people. You might be thinking about their kindness or their integrity or their honesty. And you can just picture their character, and the way God has worked in their lives, and lived through them. And you can see that they have been is a light to everyone around them.

Now I want you to think of your own life.

In our better moments God is working through us to bless those who are closest to us. In our better moments we listen to God. Our hearts are open to God and we ask for Christ to live in us and through us. And we gather strength from times of prayer, and Bible study, and worship and fellowship with other Christians.

And at other times, sometimes even within the same 24 hour period, instead of keeping the commandments, our sinful nature gets the better of us.

We may keep a commandment at one level but at a deeper level we break it.

Like when Jesus was teaching about commandments to his disciples and he was explaining to them that Pharisees were keeping the letter of the law, but not the spirit of the law. They could say, "Well, I've never committed adultery."

And then Jesus ups the ante, and said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

So the commandments are a gift a gift to show us how to find life within God's boundaries. they show us our purpose as God's people.

But they are also a Word from God that can convict us.

Just like the Israelites, when life is stressful or when life is hard, sometimes we're tempted instead of turning to God, just like the Israelites we in effect build our own Golden Calf.

Have you ever built a Golden Calf, figuratively?

Have you ever turned to food, or alcohol, or possessions, or some other thing to comfort you instead of God?

Well, this morning, the Good News is that when we find ourselves in that place, when we have turned our backs on God and turned toward other things, God never turns his back on us.

We remember that Jesus kept the commandments perfectly, and paid the price for our sins, and died and rose again, so that He could live in us, and through us.

So that daily, we could turn to the promise, the covenant God made to us in Holy Baptism, and remember that when we break God's commandments, that He calls us back to Him,

that we don't need to hide in shame, that God calls to us, and forgives our sins. and restores us to relationship with Him.

And He speaks to us again and again, through the Law, and through the Gospel... through God's Holy Word and reminds us that He will never fail us or forsake us.

God speaks to us today, calling us back into a life of service, a life of loving others, and loving Him above all things. And he calls us to set aside those other things that take His place.

For we are God's people, in Christ and through His Holy Spirit, God is alive in you and me. you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.<sup>i</sup> Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> **1 Peter 2:9**