

“The Law” New London UMC World Communion Sun., Oct. 4, 2020
Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20; Psalm 19:7-11, 14 *NRSV* Rev. Joyce Rich

I can no longer remember where I first heard, or read, this information – so I cannot give credit where credit is due. But somewhere along the line I learned that a clear, definite boundary is better than a vague, or unpredictably changing boundary. And this is the example that has stayed in my mind: if a child is told that they can play in the yard, and only in the yard – but they have no idea where the boundary line is to the yard – they are tentative and uncertain about where they can run and play until someone tells them they have gone too far. And if they get into trouble when go so far one day, and a different distance another day, and less distance on another day, they are never sure where that invisible boundary line is going to be drawn on any particular day. But if they were told: you can play in the yard, and that fence is at the edge of the yard – well, then they can run as far as the fence! As a matter of fact, they can run *full tilt* as far as the fence! Because they know where to stop. They know where they can play, and where they can’t play. They know where they are because they know where the boundary is all the time. The fence is there to clearly and definitely mark the boundary line.

In our reading from Exodus God is clearly and definitely marking the boundary line for God’s people so that they know where they can live well and freely, and where to stop before they cause harm to themselves and others. God says the boundary looks like this:

- Have no other gods before me.
- Do not make an idol to worship.
- Do not misuse my name.
- Keep the sabbath as sacred time.
- Honor your father and mother.
- Do not commit murder.
- Do not commit adultery.
- Do not steal.
- Do not bear false witness.
- Do not covet.

When you think about it, there’s really a lot of space to run and play, to live and work, to grow and to mature in our relationships with one another and with God within this boundary. There can also be great security for all who agree to live within this boundary. For example, when we live within the boundary everyone – including God – shares a rhythm of six days of work and a Sabbath day of holy rest. We hold that in common. But if we don’t take that day of rest our vulnerability is exposed. We are vulnerable to getting too tired to think straight which can lead to making poor decisions, or getting snappish with others, or deluding ourselves into thinking that everything depends on us to keep on working – which sounds a lot like we’ve either made ourselves into a god of work, or

made work our idol. By not taking a sabbath rest we could cause harm to ourselves, to others, and to our relationship with God. But if we are committed to staying within the boundary we will stop before we cause harm to ourselves, to others, and to God. Abiding within the whole boundary means that we are committed to respecting people of every generation. To respecting life. To respecting relationships. To respecting property rights. To respecting truth telling. To respecting differences. And to believing that everyone else within the boundary will do the same. We abide by the boundary for each other and for our relationship with God. We do so because we choose to. Because we have found that living within the boundary is a joy and a delight, a gift and a shared responsibility of love. We know that God set this clear and definite boundary because God loves all of God's children. And we choose to live within this boundary so we can love one another as we have been loved by God.

I want to re-read the words of the psalmist from Psalm 19. Listen to these words again as we could say them from within the boundary set by God:

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

(Psalm 19:7-11 NRSV)

The great reward is life – abundant life. Here we have a good and full life shared with one another and with God. That's what we celebrate today with all of our sisters and brothers around the world as we pull our chairs up to the family table to share a meal of remembrance. We are together to celebrate that our lives are not only bounded by love, but they are filled to overflowing with love. And we are here to give thanks to God for that amazing and ceaseless love.

Amen.