

Sermon Rules of Life Exodus 20: 1-17 March 15, 2009 Rev. Thomas L. Hall, Salem United Church of Christ, Denver, CO 80222

The scripture this morning is the familiar recording of the 10 Commandments. Many of us consider the 10 Commandments as the sine qu non of the religious faith. If we follow these rules then we would be good Christians as well as good Jews. They have been implanted on plaques in courtrooms, chiseled in the cement of walkways, plastered on walls and memorialized by Charlton Heston as he stood on Mt Zion with the lightning breaking all around him. Ah, yes, the 10 Commandments.

And I know some here recall that some time ago I said I don't follow the 10 Commandments. I didn't say I didn't believe in them. I shared that I tried to live out in my life the great commandments that Jesus gave which he said fulfill the law, the 10 Commandments. They are simply to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Today I want to clarify a bit because I know in communication, that what is said, and what is heard can be different. There is static, dissonance in our speaking and in our hearing.

We all need rules. We learn about them as children. Parents provide rules for their children, like "don't touch the stove, be neat, speak kindly or don't speak at all. Children need specifics. The 10 Commandments were given to the Hebrew people just after they left Egypt. They needed rules to live by because they were like children, they were new to this thing of God leading and guiding them. Previously they had the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the stories that surrounded the people came as a result of the relationship of God with the founders. Now God was doing a new thing, with a new prophet: Moses. The people were young and needed specific rules to govern themselves and to worship God. This is why the first four are about relationship with God. The other six are about our relationship with each other.

As our children grow older they also begin to understand and learn more about relationships. This is experienced in schools, sports, family, relatives, neighbors and friends. The book, "Everything I Needed to Learn I Learned in Kindergarten" is right on. I commend it. It speaks of basics. As we grow older, as the Hebrews grew older, God continued to be with them and lead and teach them.

When Jesus appeared on the scene, I guess God felt that the Hebrews were old enough and wise enough to have the LAW, condensed down to a few sentences. After all, it is easier to remember two, love God and love neighbor, then it is to recall 10. But as we have learned, this isn't always true. Many people need to have the whole kit and kabouddle, the whole 10 Commandments. They, like children, need specifics in defining how to live, and relate to people. They need that it isn't right to dishonor parents, to take another life, or another's spouse; that what belongs to another stays with that person-so one doesn't steal, or lie, or covet what belongs to another. Of course, all of these have been interpreted for thousands of years by Rabbis in their writings, and by our Supreme Court. There are so many loopholes, and clarifications, that libraries are built to hold the writings. If only Bernard Mardoff had learned some of these rules. Wars are created often times by not being aware of these guidelines.

Rules of Life are important, whether there are many of them or just a few. As a community of faith in the Christian tradition, I've come to appreciate and incorporate the simple phrasing of

the summary of the Law as spoken by Jesus and as exemplified by him in his relationships and attitudes with all people.

This church has a “rule of life” printed at the top of the bulletin each Sunday. You may not be aware of it. It reads, “In all things, Love.”

So what does that mean? How does that take shape? What does it look like? How is it displayed in our actions, attitudes, care of our facilities, of each other, of God’s world.

In short: a rule of life is lived out. It is practiced, seen, experienced by ourselves and others as well.

A rule of life is about structure and support for spiritual growth and development. Think of the 10 Commandments again, and reflect on how they relate to the development of the Hebrews in their spiritual growth with God and with each other. We in the church often refer to “covenant” as a close affinity to the rule of life. A covenant gives structure and support for the work of the church and the people of the community of faith. It is like a trellis.

So what is a rule of life? According to Marjorie Thompson in her book, Soul Feast, a rule of life is a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provide structure and direction for growth in holiness. Patterns refer to attitudes, behaviors or elements that are routine, repeated, and regular. They create a rhythm of life. They are like a trellis, helping the roses to grow up strong, and beautiful.

Like the trellis that helps the roses to grow, the rule of life helps us to grow into a deeper relationship with the divine, with God, with Jesus.

So what are some rules that we have now that help us in our growing into holiness? Worship is one.

I’ve talked a great deal about prayer in the Lenten discussions. Praying is one. Hospitality is one that is practiced here at Salem, as we share our facilities, as we open the doors to each other at the Wednesday meal. Speaking kindly of each other, building each other up. There are so many different rules of life that we might consider. We have to make a choice. Make one, stick with it. The rules we live by, the ones we practice daily will be seen in our attitudes, actions, words, and dispositions. They are the values that we express.

So this week, I encourage you to begin these rules of life:

- 1. Pray each day, in the morning for 30 seconds, by giving thanks for the morning.**
- 2. Walk and talk in the manner of love, for God is love....”in all things love.”**
- 3. Refrain from violence of fist, tongue or heart**
- 4. Be gracious, courteous and kind.**

As a church, we will grow deeper in connection with our Creator and Lover who offers us the gift of love. Amen.