

Did you ever wish you were in charge of the world? Well, here's your chance.

Let's Get into groups of 3 or 4. Here's your task.

Your group is God – just for now.

You are God and you are full of love for everything and everybody.

You have a park with a swimming pool, a large grassy field, and trees.

You want everyone who comes to the park to enjoy it in peace.

How would you go about making your park a place of peace and enjoyment for everyone?

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You figured that just making the facilities beautiful and nice isn't enough.

You need to work with the people who come to enjoy the park.

Because people are different, you need to come up with some sort of shared values and expectations.

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That's what God does for his people.

He wants us to live together in peace

so that we can enjoy the blessings that he gives us and pass them on to the next generations.

God's greatest desire is for us to fully revel in the joy of being home, secure, free, and prosperous.

Because of his great love for people, God does not want anyone to feel neglected or threatened.

So, when the Lord was first forming the community of his chosen people,

God gave them a set of shared values and expectations that, when followed, would ensure that everyone could live together in peace.

That's what we have in the first 5 books of the Bible, of which the 10 Commandments are a basic summary.

We call these shared values and expectations the Covenant of the Law.

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Often, people are confused about this Covenant.

Many of us, myself included, somewhere got the notion that the commandments are how we get to heaven.

Keep 'em and you're a good person, and you get the key to your heavenly home.

But nowhere does the Lord say this.

When we stop to think about it, it is absurd.

Consider that park we were talking about earlier.

Do the people who come have to keep the rules *before* they even set foot in the park? No!

Those shared expectations are for those who are already in the park!

So it is with God – **the Covenant of the Law is for those already participating in the kingdom of heaven.**

The commandments don't make us good enough to get in,
they help us who are already part of God's chosen community
to live fully in it,
to experience the peace God so desires for us.

Let me say it a different way.

When we make formal agreements, there is usually paperwork that both parties sign – I will do this, you will do that.

If either of us fails to uphold our part, it is breach of contract, and things fall apart.

If our participation in the kingdom of heaven depends on our perfectly upholding this covenant, we might as well go home, pull up the covers and turn the lights out, right? There is no hope.

But see, the thing about God is that he is not looking for ways to trip us up,

or watching our every move to catch us being bad.

This covenant of God's love – the one that asks us to

- put the Lord first in everything,
- to use his name only when we mean it,
- to keep the Lord's Day holy,
- to honor authority,

- to keep human life sacred,
- to respect marriage and family,
- to keep proper boundaries for possessions, speech, spouses and means of making a living
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- – the covenant it is impossible for people to keep perfectly
- – **this covenant is one where God has signed his part**
 - *and he has also signed our part!*
 - *The Lord himself will uphold both ends of the agreement.*

Because God wants nothing more than for us to experience shalom – peace and wholeness in him.

But how does God keep our side of this covenant,

when we disturb God's peace so much

that we deserve to be kicked out of God's presence forever?

This is how: God emptied himself into a human body

and in that human body perfectly kept the Commandments.

Jesus is the God-man who fulfils our side of the covenant for all humanity.

Jesus removes the power of our failures to separate us from God's peace.

Jesus not only lived in perfect obedience to the Father, but destroyed *all* our failures in death on the cross;

and he rose from death **to restore perfect peace,**

perfect wholeness, perfect shalom.

...

Now somebody will ask, "Since God has upheld both parts of this covenant, and keeping the commandments doesn't get us brownie points with God,

why should we even bother trying to keep them? Why can't we just live as we please?"

The counter question is this: Why would we want to do that?

Why would we want to create chaos and disharmony just for some fleeting pleasure?

Isn't that the question we want to ask Nicholas Cruz? Or the Central School student? Or folks like Bill Cosby and Matt Lauer?

Doesn't God's infinite love for us make us want instead to live in gratitude for the peace that passes understanding?

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Consider this:

If mayhem broke out in our parks – if people were routinely

dumping trash, befouling the pool water,

smashing windows and beating up other people,

we would close the park down, right?

The costs are too great – the cost to repair and restore, replace and renew.

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Thanks be to God that he doesn't shut down the kingdom of heaven because of our bad behavior.

Thanks be to God that even though the cost to repair, restore, replace, and renew the universe is **the life of God's only beloved Son,**

God nonetheless pays that price **and invites us daily to share that sacred space with him.**

- **Isn't it wonderful that the burden of proving ourselves good enough is completely removed to Jesus' cross?**
- Isn't it wonderful that even our flawed efforts at living in peace are accepted by God?
- Isn't it wonderful that we don't have to play God in a misguided attempt to qualify for eternal life?

Instead, we get to praise and worship the living God whose love for us is greater than

all our failures,

sins, and

disturbances of his peace.

We get to do nothing but offer our lives in worship to God, who raised Jesus from the dead to give us life forever.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Lent 3B
4 March 2018
St. Peter's
Exodus 20