

Wisdom for the Way

October 5 • 2008

Focus Scripture

Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9,
12–20

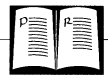
Additional Scriptures

Psalms 19

Philippians 3:4b–14

Matthew 21:33–46

Wise God, ground us in your word and your way as we continue to grow as a community of your people. Strengthen our willingness to listen to your wisdom and live by it, blessed by your promise of new life when we do. Amen.



Replacement biblical background page for Lutheran, Episcopal, and Anglican congregations using the paired reading stream of the Revised Common Lectionary is on the Congregational Life Paired Reading CD.

If you have Internet access, visit www.spiritseasons.com to access *Spirit Sightings* for connections between current events and the focus passage.

God's wisdom for creating healthy communities is found in the Ten Commandments. Such wise words are gifts from God to help our lives work better. This week, listen as the readings call us to consider again what God desires for our world and to learn patterns of living shaped by God's wisdom.

Focus Scripture: Exodus 20:1–4, 7–9, 12–20

The people of Israel continue their wilderness journey. In the story last week, the thirsty community cried out for water, and God made water flow from a rock. In the reading this week, we find them at the mountain of Sinai.

Exodus 19 sets the stage for God's delivery of the Ten Commandments. Sinai is set apart as a separate or holy place, and Moses is affirmed as God's spokesperson. The giving of the Ten Commandments becomes a sign of God's covenant with the people of Israel. They are a practical outworking of God's intention for God's people to live whole and healthy lives.

The original form and Hebrew language in these verses suggest that the Commandments first may have been simply a list of ten words – murder, idolatry, adultery, and so on. These words were shorthand for a rule of life to guide the people of Israel along their journey to becoming the nation that was promised to Abraham.

The Ten Commandments summarize God's rule for life. In the first commandment we are told to acknowledge God as the one who liberates, and are called to honour our relationship with God. In the commandment regarding Sabbath, we are told to match the rhythm of our lives with God's own rhythm. In the remaining commandments, God's wisdom lays out how to live so that our relationships with other people reflect God's relationship with us. Protestant theologian John Calvin (1509–1564) noted that every negative implies a positive: "do not kill" implies "support the living." The Commandments offer a vision of the world that God has promised to bring to fulfillment.

In the Bible, the Ten Commandments are sometimes known as God's law or the Law of Moses, and form the cornerstone of Israelite society. All were called to obey these concrete expressions of God's

wisdom and will, regardless of occupation or social class. In the Hebrew Scriptures, "the law" also refers to all of the cultural knowledge that one generation passes on to another. Later, the term *Torah* is used to refer to the law, while also encompassing the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Talmud, commentaries on God's law.

God's wise ways continue to sustain the earth. **Psalm 19** declares that God's law – God's way of life for the world – brings joy and light to all who live within it.

Paul, in **Philippians 3:4b–14**, claims the wisdom and joy of knowing Christ as the centre of our lives. When Paul speaks of "confidence in the flesh," he refers to the achievements – by birth or one's own effort – that give people "credit" in the world's eyes. In his accounting metaphor, Paul counts these as loss. For Christians, there can be only one item on the credit side: Christ.

Jesus' parable in **Matthew 21:33–46** seems a word of sobering wisdom. The Jerusalem leaders hear that Jesus' wisdom is for them. Rather than accepting the challenge of these words, they turn on Jesus. They find no joy in the wisdom of God's word made flesh.

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As we seek God's wisdom along the journey of life, we grow as a community grounded in God's word. Our merciful, loving God beckons us anew each day to focus on the liberation that is ours when Christ is the centre of our lives. Today's readings reveal glimpses of a world where God's wisdom shapes all patterns of human living. We are called to live into this vision. What is it like to live our lives according to God's wisdom? What might we see happening in our communities when we live in God's wise ways?

