

**LENT THREE YEAR B  
BREACH THEME  
EXODUS 20: 1-20  
March 11, 2012**

If you haven't been with us for the past two services, you'll probably have figured out by now that this Lenten season we're exploring the image you saw at the top of the order of service. Isaiah, in chapter 58, says "you shall be called repairers of the breach". It was the reading for Ash Wednesday, which, as you know, begins the season of Lent.

Alongside that reading, we've considered a story about Rabbi Abraham Herschel, who used to say: "When God, the Holy One, gets up in the morning, God gathers the angels all around, and asks one simple question: *Where does my creation need mending today?*"

Isn't that beautiful? I like that. God, a mender.

And that's what Ruth has been doing each week as we worship. I asked her to simply sit there and mend things. (Right now I think she's hemming Sheila's pants...) Mending.

Mending is such a gentle, unassuming kind of activity, don't you find? You need to be patient, and satisfied with small successes. You need to believe that the thing you're working with is worth it; worth saving, worth the effort.

All of that is so....so GOD.

Today, we're going to move to holding up the Exodus account of the giving of the law. The ten commandments themselves, and the story of Israel receiving them.

Let me offer you an image as we move into that text.

What are the 10 commandments like, and with what shall we compare them?

Martin Luther directed that they should be read at every worship service, right before the prayer of confession.

John Calvin also expected that they be read at each service, but he said they should be read after the assurance of pardon.

Many people have offered images: They are like strong poles for the tent of society, someone says. Without strong tent poles you can have a lovely canvas, but it won't hold up; without the poles you have a puddle of canvas.

Or

they are like a fence, preventing us from stepping into dangerous places

or

they are like honey, sweet to the tongue and sweeter than the honey in the comb.

Or

having the promise and grace of God without the law is like having fresh clean water with nothing to hold it in; no cup no container.

**Here's one – this is mine, now:**

**When a person is good at mending, not only do they fix the broken places, mend the rips and tears and snags,**

**but they also look at the garment, see its strengths and weaknesses, and anticipate where the weak seams are and where pressure might make them come apart.**

**And a good mender sees that before it happens**

**and reinforces the seams. Sews the button on more tightly before it comes off.**

**Does that make sense?**

**The commandments are like that.**

**They see the places we are likely to get ourselves into trouble.**

**They know us; know us as a whole garment, as it were.**

**They're very honest that way.**

**And they reinforce the seam.**

**Tighten the stitches that will keep us close to one another**

**to God, our Creator,**

**and to our own best, most whole and healthy selves.**

**Just to back up for a bit – how did we get here, at the foot of a smoking mountain?**

**The readings this Lent Tide are taking us through the covenants made by God with the people.**

**Covenants – themselves a kind of mending - “co” - (together) “ven” (coming) i.e. Coming together. Covenant.**

**We began with the covenant made with Noah, his family and the whole earth after the flood. The sign and seal of that covenant was - what?**

**The rainbow. Bridging heaven and earth.**

**And so you'll see we're building a rainbow here – always with a gap, always a breach - until Easter Sunday, when in one shining moment it will be whole.**

**Last week, the readings recalled for us the covenant with Sarah and Abraham; an elderly childless couple, invited by God to leave everything behind, and follow.**

**God promised them three things. What were they?**

**1) a land. 2) children – as many as .....**

**and 3) God's own presence.**

**On the strength of that promise, and with the sign and seal of it marked on their own bodies, the males among them at any rate, (what was the sign of that covenant again?)**

**They follow.**

**YEARS pass.**

**Abraham and Sarah DO have a child. His name is \_\_\_\_\_**

**Through a long and winding road, and several generations, (the does not try to hide the breaches in them or their relationships...there is no attempt to cover up the fears and foibles and just plain**

sinful things that happen along the way...  
they end up as slaves in Egypt  
and one of them, hears a voice from a burning bush.  
Who was that?

Moses hears a voice ....THE Voice....  
and the Holy One once again begins the mending of what has been torn apart.

I've heard your cries, God says.  
I know your suffering.  
I am the One the Holy One who promised these things to you and to your ancestors and I'm with  
you yet  
and I need YOU to repair this breach.  
Go to the Pharaoh. Go to Pharaoh and tell old Pharaoh to \_\_\_\_\_

And so, the Exodus....the parting of the sea, the wandering in the wilderness, - how long did they  
wander?

And finally, in the midst of that wandering, this scene:

We've read the account.  
It stands alone, in many ways.  
It is perhaps the most well known of the Biblical teachings. Or at least, if not known, known  
*about.*  
People who will fight for the right to post them in public places often can't name them...but I  
digress.

What is to say about all this?

Again, with the Psalmist, we want to say that

*The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul  
the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple  
more to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold  
sweeter also than the honey and the honeycomb.*

They are given amid smoke and cloud  
these are not unfamiliar – these are God's calling cards. Smoke, fire, thunder, these are not meant  
to intimidate, to frighten or repel  
but to say  
“It's me! Remember? I'm the one who led you by a pillar of fire and a cloud in the wilderness.  
I'm the one who passed between the halves of the slain animal as I made covenant with your  
ancestors Abraham and Sarah. Smoke and fire is how you knew me then too.  
I'm the One who appeared in a burning bush to Moses.”

These laws are not being given by some angry distant Lord, sword drawn to punish  
but by the One they've always known  
El Shaddai  
the Holy One

who birthed them  
held their hands as they learned to walk  
heard them when they cried out  
fed them with manna in the wilderness  
and promised them "I'll never leave you. EVER."  
I'll be your God. You be my people. \  
and this is how I need you to live.

This is what you were made for.  
These laws have the feeling of intimate knowledge....  
God knows them. Knows us.  
Where we are likely to be weak, the kinds of things that are tempting to us and that lead to pain  
in the end, no matter how we rationalize in the moment...  
where we break apart, tear open, hurt one another..  
God knows us.

To a very broken people, God offers this gracious, sweet gift

In Hebrew, the language is intimate, and gives a feeling of almost talking to children. Where we  
say "Thou shalt not steal" for example, the Hebrew uses two words. In essence, "no stealing".

These laws are simple in the extreme. Ten things to make life sweet; to honour God and our  
neighbour. Reinforcing the seams of a garment that holds us together as a society.

This is what we were made for. Responsible living, caring for each other. Making sure we keep  
our priorities clear. Know who and what comes first in life.

It's sweet, like honey.  
And inside we knew it all along.  
The keeping of the law draws from us an inner light, pure and bright, from deep inside us.  
Draws it out into the sunlight  
where it meets the sunshine  
and refracts into colours so beautiful  
it would put stars in your eyes.

May God richly bless you  
and may you know the sweetness and grace of the Holy One  
who loves you  
until the stars refuse to shine.

Amen.