

## **Chaos and Order**

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church

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Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20

Matthew 21:33-46

### **Exodus 20:1–4, 7-9, 12–20**

Then God spoke all these words: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin."

The word of the Lord.

## Matthew 21:33–46

<sup>33</sup>“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. <sup>34</sup>When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. <sup>35</sup>But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup>Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. <sup>37</sup>Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ <sup>38</sup>But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ <sup>39</sup>So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. <sup>40</sup>Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ <sup>41</sup>They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.’ <sup>42</sup>Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes’? <sup>43</sup>Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. <sup>44</sup>The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.’ <sup>45</sup>When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup>They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

On this pleasant Sunday in October, I don’t know what I was thinking; today’s lessons are the Ten Commandments and the parable of the landowner and the watchtower, what in the world? It is because we are in the world Jesus’ parable that involves greed and treachery may be

exactly what we need to hear today. The Ten Commandments gives us something to deal with this very parable. We are no stranger to senseless violence and twisted thinking around us.

Today's readings show the timeless struggle between order and chaos. It is by the order of the law given to us from God by which we are to live. When those laws are not followed and when we believe we are beyond the law or can set our own laws, chaos ensues.

Treachery is part of the first stories of the Bible. Cain the first child of Adam and eve kills his brother Abel in a jealous rage. The Old Testament is filled with people turning on each other. Daniel is thrown into the lion's den because he would not bow down to the political authority. Early Christians are faced with social and economic ruin or even executed because they would not worship Caesar. Lest we think we are always on the virtuous side when it comes to violence, remember the crusades where Christian Europeans set off to the holy land to wipe out the infidels. We are still paying the price of distrust and violence over the centuries with those who do not believe like we do. The inquisition, the "Holy Wars" all lend to chaos by those who think that they are following God's laws. We recoil in horror at terrorist groups and we wonder why they are so filled with hate. We are in a world equipped with rules to instill order, yet chaos is always near.

Our order comes down from Mount Sinai given to Moses. The former slaves of Egypt are given a standard by which to live. God gives them order in laws so that justice might reign.

Centuries later, Jesus sums up the Ten Commandments into two parts; love the lord your God with all your being and love your neighbor as yourself.

God gives us laws to live by because God knows that we humans are capable of a magnitude of destruction and chaos. It is not only those other people who do not think as we do who can cause destruction, it is also us. Chaos can happen within. Jesus is well aware of how violent and cruel God's own people can be.

These verses in Matthew show a dangerous passage for Jesus. Jesus is not addressing the people but directly faces the Pharisees and church leaders. They are the insiders, and they know more about God's order and laws and the average person. What makes the passage even more dangerous is that they know that Jesus is directing this parable to them. This parable is not about cute little lost sheep or harmless bread, it is about people and it is about greed and murder.

Chaos happens when the law is not followed, chaos happens when we make our own rules and follow our own order.

The landowner builds up a business and provides all the tools that are needed to carry out the business. He plants a vineyard, and he carefully marks the boundaries of it so that there will be no question as to what is his. He places a watchtower to protect the land and to keep the workers free from the threat that comes from the outside. The landowner leaves. Everything is in order. The tenants do not follow the rules. Eventually the landowner sends his representatives to collect the rent and the tenants attack the landowner's people. The landowner tries again and the tenants kill his people. The landowner thinks if he sends his son, they will listen to reason and respect the order that has been set; even the landowner's son is not spared by the murderous tenants.

It is not from some outside source that destroys what the landowner has; it comes from within. Those who have been given the law those who know that benefits of order have ignored it for their own gains.

The Pharisees get it, they know that Jesus pointing a finger at them. What is even more telling is their response; they wanted to arrest Jesus, but they fear the crowds. They will have to bide their time, but it is clear they want to silence him. They have a chance to embrace God's order but they move farther from it.

We have been given the law. That law has been written on our hearts through Jesus as he tells us to love the lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind and to love our neighbor as our self.

Years ago, China provocatively invaded Tibet. the Tibetans asked in dismay, why would China do this to us? The Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dali Llama suggested that they were asking the wrong question. Rather they should ask what we have done to them?

When we start making up our own version of rules to live by, we invite the chaos to reign. God has laid down the law, ten do's and don'ts to live by. Jesus made it even simpler by grouping them into our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. It is up to us to decide the path we want to take. It may not be the most comfortable path or the easy path. It takes taking a look at ourselves and listening to Jesus' difficult parables in a way that has the power of looking at the world differently.

The table is calling us and the world to sit with Jesus and with all those around the world who are committed to living within God's order.  
Amen.