

Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church
Rev. Bob Undercuffler

March 8, 2015
Newark, Delaware

(Girl Scout Sunday)

Psalm 19:1-4, 7-11, 14
Exodus 20:1-17

“Law and Faithful Community”

This morning’s message is about the law. I’m plowing new ground here. I’ll admit to this ... over the past ten years I’ve preached no sermons on the law. Zilch. Rather, my sermons have been dedicated to GRACE. MERCY. FORGIVENESS. KINDNESS, UNDERSTANDING. COMPASSION. Those are attributes of God.

And they are qualities demonstrated by Jesus.

Yes, they are the ways of Jesus.

And they are qualities/they are ways to be valued and lived by you and by me.

But this morning, the third Sunday in Lent, the lectionary (the calendar of scripture lessons for each Sunday/a calendar followed by many churches ... which keeps the preacher from wandering far and wide and preaching only from favorite passages/and invites the preacher to dip into more perplexing passages, seeking richer truth.

So for this Sunday the lectionary advises, preach from Exodus, chapter 20:1-20. That’s the Ten Commandments! Law, Law, Law. Now I do have a choice. I can veer off the lectionary path. Find a more applicable passage. One that relates more closely to Girl Scouts – more closely to our congregation.

So today I’m tempted to veer-off the lectionary path. I’ll preach on the commandments another time. Perhaps on one of those snow Sundays when church is called-off.

But this is Girl Scout Sunday, and right here, earlier in our confession, we lifted-up the Girl Scout laws. They are at the heart of Girl Scouting. Juliette Gordon Low defined those laws as ways of living that identify Girl Scouts. And it isn’t “select laws 1,3,5,7,9.” Or pick one law ... any law and follow that one

completely. But rather, Girl Scouts may not pick and choose among the laws. In the Girl Scout family, it's this entire body of laws that bind you together and make you special. They are embedded in your DNA. That is who Girl Scouts are.

So I'm not going to swing off course this morning. My unwavering focus this morning is on the law.

Sarah read Psalm 19. That's the Psalm suggested by the lectionary for this Sunday.

Let these words from Psalm 19 be emblazoned on your minds and sealed in your hearts:

*"The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
 The decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;
 The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
 The commandments of the Lord are clear, enlightening the eyes;
 The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether;
 More to be desired are they than gold,
 Even much fine gold
 Sweeter also than honey,
 And drippings of the honeycomb."*

I wonder, what's that all about? Laws & ordinances & commandments sweeter than honey?
 More to be desired than gold? ...

What is it that I have missed about laws? And what good are laws? What makes them sweet and more desired than gold?
 In my experience, Law gives birth to more laws. And life can be consumed by defining the law, and maintaining the law, and strengthening the law. And walking the narrowing boundaries proscribed by the law.
 How can the law revive my soul?
 Or bring joy to my heart?
 Or enlighten me in any way?
 How can the law be good enough to eat?
 Sweeter than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb?

Well, here's the marvelous wonder of the Girl Scout laws:
They bind you with a marvelous band of girls and women
reaching back to Juliette Gordon Low.

Those laws unite you with a woman – and with women of
remarkable vision, courage and commitment.

Those laws link you with pathfinders, blazing new
trails through wilderness, confusion, and tough
times.

The laws guide their deciding, and teaching, and mentoring, and
leading.

Scout leaders came to me some years ago and tearfully told me
of a girl in their Cadette troop. Her name was Claudia. She was
highly regarded among the girls and leaders alike ... But she had
betrayed the Scout promise and law. Claudia had stolen cookie
money. And all came to know it. Claudia, herself, was terribly
embarrassed ... she withdrew from the troop. She stopped
attending.

The Girl Scout leaders who came to see me were angry,
heartbroken, discouraged. They feared that they had somehow
failed as leaders. I did a lot of listening and some encouraging.

Then the leaders sprang into action with a plan created by
the corps of leaders.

They met with Claudia. They explained how she had
betrayed their trust...and had broken promise with the
other girls.

And, they affirmed to her, face to face, “Claudia, you
are still a part of our troop.”

They challenged her to speak with the girls and
ask their forgiveness.

They asked her to develop a plan to repay
the money.

I saw something of how that played-out.

Forgiveness.

Reconciliation.

Recovery....

Seldom move forward in a straight line. But there was healing.
A year or two later, as I was leaving that church community I
received a note from Claudia's mother:

“Thank you for supporting the Girl Scout leaders as they challenged and supported our daughter. That was a life-changing moment for Claudia ... and for our family. We remember, and are grateful.”

That reads like a heart-felt song—

The law, lived-out by faithful, loving people, like a Girl Scout troop. A caring/committed community is what holds us together, and gives us strength for our journey.

BUT WE ARE NOT ALL GIRL SCOUTS. (though you may recall I was a cookie mother for several years as our daughters were working their way through scouts)

So here are additional laws, ten laws for everyone, known often as Ten Commandments.

How can we stand before these laws?

Four have to do with our relationship with God.

Six with how we relate to one another.

And again, I wonder ... what good are laws?

Laws give birth to more laws. And life can be consumed by defining the law, and maintaining the law, and strengthening the law. And walking the narrowing boundaries proscribed by the law.

So how can the law revive my soul?

Or bring joy to my heart?

Or enlighten me in any way?

How can the law be good enough to eat?
Sweeter than honey. And drippings of the
honeycomb?

Well, here's the marvelous wonder of God's laws. These Ten Commandments:

They bind us with a marvelous band of people reaching back to Abraham and Moses, rulers and prophets, song writers, and writers of good news ... they bind us with Jesus and saints of all time.

These laws unite us with men and woman of remarkable vision, courage and commitment.

These laws link us with pathfinders, blazing new trails through wilderness, confusion, and tough times.

These laws guide our deciding, and teaching, and mentoring, and leading.

Here's what we too often miss – The Ten Commandments are prefaced by these words ...

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; THEREFORE...

Those words are a critical reminder:

Remember them –

Remember your ancestors.

Remember your loving, faithful God who leads, and molds and shapes a family of the faithful.

Yes, shapes and embraces a faithful community.

THEREFORE, being embraced within that community

You shall have no other God before the Lord God.

You shall make and worship no idol,

You shall not make wrongful use of God's name,

You shall keep the Sabbath Day holy.

Honor your father and mother,

Do not murder,

Do not commit adultery,

Do not steal,

Do not bear false witness,

Do not covet anything that is your neighbors.

Girl Scouts, leaders parents – Members and friends of Head of Christiana –

It is well that we have some laws to guide us.

The laws place us within a community of care and commitment.

“I the Lord your God who has brought you out of bondage ,, out of slavery ... brought you out of every kind of bad thing that could haunt and crush you and make you less a person than God intends.

THEREFORE be faithful to God ... faithful to others, knowing that you belong to God ... and to your FAITHFUL COMMUNITY FOREVER.

