

The call of the commandments (Exodus 20:1-17)

From the beginning—“I am the Lord your God”—the Decalogue is about vocation.

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We learn about rules from an early age. Often they're couched in a desire to keep precious bodies safe. Don't climb on top of anything that is taller than you. Don't stick anything into the outlets. Don't eat anything off of the floor.

And then, the rules expand outward as we notice the other bodies around us. The rules guide us to treat each other in a certain way. Don't hit. Don't kick. Don't bite, touch, or look. Invariably, the rules include everything from language to roles to driving to football. It's a lot to keep up with.

I remember having to learn and memorize the Ten Commandments during my confirmation process. It was impressed on us not only that these rules perfectly encapsulated how we were to behave—to live our lives—but that following them would lead somehow to success and blessing. It might have been a mix of evangelical legalism and Confucian philosophy within our Korean immigrant congregation that led to this perspective.

As I embraced God's love I wondered how to understand the commandments in light of God's ceaseless grace. I had heard various approaches, everything from reading the commandments as descriptive of a community that lives in covenantal love to understanding the importance of neighbor and community as central to our identity as God's people. These are insightful ideas, and so good and helpful still. Yet as we

continue into the middle of the Lenten season, what I'm drawn to are the words at the beginning of the Decalogue: "I am the Lord your God."

Who is the source of not only our identity, but our community? Who is the center of our relationships, our interactions, our encounters, our connections? What and how we think about God impacts our thoughts and actions toward neighbors. The commandments, then, are vocational—and they remind us that at the heart of each person's calling is the call of God, who "spoke these words" to God's people.

Vocation doesn't simply mean responsibility or duty. Seeing the commandments this way reminds us that what we do has eternal significance, no matter how big or small the gesture.