

October 4, 2026 — Sermon

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

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33–46

“Remember Whose We Are”

When I lived in Korea, I knew how to live in Korea. I knew the laws, the systems, and the everyday rules of life. But after moving to the United States, I had to learn many things again. Driving was different. Insurance was different. Banking was different. And one of the hardest things for me to learn was taxes. I had to learn what a W-2 was, what a W-4 was, how tax withholding worked, and what deductions meant. I am still learning.

And through these experiences, I realized something simple. Once I left Korea, I could not simply keep living according to the Korean system. Even if I tried to find the Korean way of doing something here, sometimes it just did not work. Because this is not Korea. In a new land, we have to learn a new way of life. And I think the rules we follow, the values we practice, and the choices we make tell us something about who we are and whose we are.

Something similar was happening to the Israelites in today’s reading. For generations, they had lived in Egypt. They knew how life worked under Pharaoh. They knew what was expected of them. They knew what it meant to live as slaves. But God brought them out of Egypt. They were no longer Pharaoh’s slaves. They were now God’s people.

But they had physically left Egypt, and that did not necessarily mean Egypt had completely left them. For generations, they had learned one way of life. So God was not simply moving them from one geographical place to another. God was teaching them how to become a different kind of people. And this is where the Ten Commandments come in.

Notice the order. God did not say, “Here are ten commandments. If you follow them, then I will rescue you.” God rescued them first. The commandments begin: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

First came liberation. First came grace. First came a new identity. And then God said: “Now learn how to live as my people.”

The commandments did not make Israel God's people. The commandments reminded them who they were and whose they were.

Of course, Egypt also had laws. Every society needs rules because human beings need a way to live together. Some laws of Egypt and some commandments of God might even have looked similar. But the important question is not only, "What does the law say?" We also need to ask: "What is the spirit behind the law?"

Under Pharaoh, the Israelites experienced a system that constantly demanded production. Make more bricks. Work harder. Do not stop.

But then God gives these former slaves a remarkable commandment: Remember the Sabbath. Stop. Rest. And not only you. Your children should rest. Your servants should rest. The foreigners among you should rest. Even your animals should rest.

Think about what this means to former slaves. God is saying: "You are no longer Pharaoh's slaves. Your worth is not determined by how much you produce." But God is also saying: "Now that you are free, do not become Pharaoh to someone else."

God's commandments teach liberated people how to live together in freedom—with God and with one another. God is not simply creating people who can memorize rules. God is forming a people. As we said in our Call to Worship: God calls us not only to know the commandments, but to live with faithfulness, justice, and love.

And this brings us to Jesus' parable.

A landowner plants a vineyard. He puts a fence around it, digs a winepress, builds a watchtower, and entrusts it to tenants. In the Roman world, tenant farmers could live under real economic pressure from rent, taxes, debt, and unequal land ownership. So perhaps Jesus' listeners could understand some frustration on the part of these tenants. Maybe their anger did not come from nowhere.

But Jesus takes the story much further. The owner sends servants to receive the fruit. The tenants beat them and kill them. Finally, he sends his son. And they say: "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance."

Now their problem becomes clear. They are no longer simply frustrated tenants. They want to possess what was entrusted to them. They were tenants, but they began to live like owners. They forgot something very important. They forgot whose vineyard it was.

And faith asks us a similar question. We say: My time. My money. My abilities. My home. My family. My church. My future. There is nothing wrong with saying those

things. But faith asks one more question: "Is this really only mine? Or is this also something God has entrusted to me?"

Faith means that I do not see everything I have as completely and absolutely my own. My time may be mine, but it is also entrusted to me. My abilities may be mine, but they are also entrusted to me. My resources, relationships, and even my life itself are gifts placed in my care.

And sometimes it takes courage to live that way. It takes courage to share. It takes courage to forgive. It takes courage to tell the truth. Sometimes it takes courage to ask not only, "What do I want?" but, "What does God want me to do with what has been entrusted to me?" Faithfulness sometimes requires courage.

And today this question becomes even larger, because today is World Communion Sunday.

On the first Sunday of October, churches around the world gather at the Lord's Table. We are physically far apart. We speak different languages and live in different cultures. Because of time zones, we are not even worshiping at the same moment. Some Christians may already have finished worship before we begin. Others may not yet have begun Sunday morning.

And yet, through Communion, we participate in something that reaches beyond geography and time. We come to the same table of Christ. We may not sing the same songs. We may not pray in the same language. But we belong to the same Christ.

Communion is not only a time to remember what Jesus did. It is also a time to remember who we are and whose we are.

I am Korean. I now live in the United States. Some of you have lived in Wisconsin all your lives. We have different histories and experiences. But at this table, we remember something deeper. We belong to Christ. And because we belong to Christ, we also belong to one body.

So today, Exodus, the vineyard, and this Communion table ask us the same question. In Exodus, God says: "You are my people. Learn to live as my people." In the vineyard, Jesus warns us: "Do not forget whose vineyard it is." And at this table, Christ reminds us: "Remember who you are. Remember whose you are."

When I came to the United States, I had to learn a new way of life. And I am still learning. As Christians, we are also still learning how to live as God's people. How to love. How to forgive. How to rest. How to share. How to use faithfully what has been entrusted to us.

The commandments begin not with what Israel must do, but with what God has already done. The vineyard begins not with what the tenants built, but with what the owner had already provided. And our faith begins not with what we have done for God, but with what God has already given us in grace.

So today, as we come to this table with Christians around the world, let us remember who we are. And even more importantly, let us remember whose we are.

We are God's people. We belong to Christ. And because we belong to Christ, may the way we live reveal it—with faithfulness, with justice, with courage, and with love. Amen.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, thank you for calling us your people and for reminding us that all we have is a gift from you. Help us remember whose we are. Teach us to live with faithfulness, justice, courage, and love. As we come to your table with Christians around the world, make us one in Christ and help our lives bear good fruit for your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.