

Proper 22 (A) – September 25, 2011  
Saint Stephen's Church, Wimberley, TX  
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Exodus 20:1-20  
*Take a Back Seat*

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When he landed on his seat for the first time, he was angry. The second time he was knocked on his rear end, he was fuming. My friend was a two time All-American NCAA quarterback, and he was not accustomed to being knocked on his rear-end from the blind side. You don't get to be an All-American if that happens too often. So in the huddle, he looked over to his left at the huge Herculean tackle and said, "I am getting knocked on my seat over and over again out there. What's the problem?"

The mountainous tackle had a bit of a speech impediment that was only amplified by his big plastic mouthpiece, "I-hab-a-wok-in-my-shoe." The quarterback and the rest of the huddle just stared at him, not knowing what in the world the tackle said. So the tackle hurriedly offered his excuse once more: "I-hab-a-wok-in-my-shoe." Still having no clue what the tackle said, my friend quickly called the play and the team broke the huddle and made for the line of scrimmage. But then on the very next play my friend the quarterback was knocked flat on his seat again, and this time back in the huddle he was not nearly so nice: "What in the heck are you doing over there. I got crushed again by that defensive end!" The hulking tackle took out his mouthpiece this time and said much more slowly, "I-hab-a-wok-in-my-shoe." The quarterback immediately called a timeout so that his big tackle could take off his shoe and get the rock out. My friend was not sacked another time.

Leave it to a man to use a football story to illustrate the scripture! Regardless, we can learn three important lessons from this gridiron episode: One, to get our attention we sometimes have to be knocked on our seat a few times. Two, at those times, we need to listen to a voice other than our own. Three, once we listen, we need to come to a full stop and make some changes.

I bet the Ten Commandments hit the Israelites about that same way. First, until our fellowship studied the Exodus story from top to bottom these past few weeks, I never realized how many times the Israelites are knocked on their seat before they ever arrive at the base of Mount Sinai. Fear, hunger, thirst, anger, and most especially their self-absorption take their feet out from under them over and over again. The Israelites are becoming the sum of those experiences, and they can't like what they see in themselves. Second, the Israelites are beginning to realize they don't have the answer to their shortcomings within themselves. They need to hear another voice – God's voice in order to see their way ahead to a better future. Third, once they hear God's instructions in the Ten Commandments, they come to a full stop at Mount Sinai. They don't know it yet, but they are given an internal *GPS* by which those commandments will get written across their very lives.

So what do the Ten Commandments tell us about God's will for the Israelites and ultimately for us? Initially, God just wants to "show" Israel how much he loves them. The first three commandments remind the Israelites that the same God who led them out of slavery in Egypt is the One giving them the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, they are to resist all those things that masquerade as gods because there is no love or life in them. Those false gods will leave us empty and flat on our seats. The Lord states to Moses that He alone is intent on "showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments" ...that would include us **(EX 20:6)**.

The hinge commandment is the fourth one – "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy" **(20:8)**. Again, God is not a party pooper, just trying to keep us out of the malls and from NFL overdose. No, the Lord's intention through the Sabbath is to connect our lives to the rhythm of creation – "on the seventh day the Lord rested" **(Genesis 2:1-3)** and to remind us constantly that the Lord delivers us from bondage or all sorts – "remember that you were slaves in Egypt" **(DT 5:15)**. The Sabbath – Sunday worship and rest – is not to be a hindrance to us but a gift of liberation that binds us more and more to God's intention at the beginning of creation. By keeping Sabbath, we become a marquis to others that there is a more fulfilling way to live and in so doing we keep reminding ourselves, too!

The remaining six commandments are all about living into our new found freedom in God through the exercise of healthy human relationships. In that way, the love and freedom God has showered on us must show up in our daily interactions with others. Our lives become one fabric of devotion to God and to each other. The key word to understanding these six commandments appears in the last commandment – *covet*, which in Hebrew is *khamad*, meaning to "lust after" **(EX 20:17)**. Lusting after something that is not ours is directly connected to worshipping something that is not God. It is adultery of the highest order. No, instead the Ten Commandments, the divine instructions from God, are to be written across our lives. Jesus himself told the disciples as much during his last meal with them: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" **(JN 13:34-35)**. Jesus is saying what a miracle will occur when you take a back seat for another.

It's being written across our lives; though we may not know it. On Tuesday, I took a drive with one of the workers at last Saturday's *Jubilee* construction project where we repaired the home of a young widowed mother and another of a senior disabled family. Early on Saturday morning, my friend was a supply company picking up some equipment to complete the *Jubilees*, when the lady at the checkout counter asked, "Are you from Saint Stephen's?" When he said "yes", she went on to tell him: "For two years your fellowship provided Christmas for my children when we had been knocked down and had no hope of recovering. You saved us." The liberation that comes from God, his mercy, his grace, his love was written all across my friend's life that morning...but he didn't yet know it. That's what happens when we take a back seat to God.