

Sunday, October 8, 2023 – Easter Hill United Methodist Church
Bible Study
“Fruit of the Kingdom”
Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20 and Matthew 21:33-46

Open with a word of prayer

Gathering Time (5-10 minutes). In pairs or groups of three, have participants answer the following: “Rules and laws are often hard to follow when no one is watching. Which rules or laws do you see people breaking most often? (traffic, parking, others?)”

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20. Context. As the Exodus story unfolds, it had been three months after leaving Egypt that the people reached God’s holy mountain. God promised Moses that if the people would keep the covenant that they were about to make, they would be God’s special nation. When Moses communicated this to the elders, they agreed to enter into the covenant with God. God then instructed Moses on how the people were to prepare themselves for the encounter. Moses set a boundary on the mountain beyond which the people were not to go, and then after three days of preparation, God descended upon the mountain in fire and smoke, with lightning and frightful noises. The people gathered at the foot of the mountain as Moses went up the mountain to meet God. Traditionally, the Ten Commandments are divided into two “tablets” the first describing how we relate to God and the second, how we relate to each other.

Matthew 21:33-46. Context. As the tension mounted between Jesus and his enemies in his last week in Jerusalem, he hurled parable after parable against them. This week’s reading is a transparent allegory accusing the community's religious leaders of abusing the prophets sent by God, culminating in a prediction of what they would do to him, who would become by Matthew’s day the cornerstone of a new community of God’s people.

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

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

Read Matthew 21:33-46

What touches your heart, what do you hear in the scripture, what questions do you have, or what doesn’t make sense to you in the text?

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

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

Read Matthew 21:33-46 again -

Write down your thoughts or share your thoughts with the person or group you are with.

- Read the Exodus 20 verses in your group. Which of these commandments are easiest to follow? Which are hardest? What makes them easy or difficult for us?
- The Ten Commandments are often grouped into categories: rules about our relationship with God and rules about our relationship with others. How do you see these two categories intertwined? How do they work together to shape our faith?
- Read Exodus 20:3 aloud. How do we keep this commandment today? What are some of the other ‘gods’ that we give our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness to in place of the one true God?
- In the Matthew passage, it is hard to read that the tenants are violent and kill those whom the landowner calls his own, be they his servants or his son. Who was the intended audience of that day? What would this parable have meant to those who heard it in Jesus’ time? What does it mean for us today?
- Read Psalm 118:22 aloud. Compare that verse with Matthew 21:42. What do you notice as you compare the two? Why did the religious leaders reject Jesus as the cornerstone? How does our community often forget that Jesus is the cornerstone of our faith?

Closing Reflection Question

How is this scripture calling you to change, to see, to be or what might it be calling you to do?

Prayer (10 minutes). Share prayer requests and respond appropriately.

Sending Forth (2 minutes). After all, have shared, end by praying the following or a similar prayer:

Almighty God, the author and perfecter of our faith, give us the grace and wisdom to follow your commandments and make Jesus the cornerstone of our faith. May we receive Jesus and those who serve you in your vineyard. In Jesus' name, **Amen.**

And now we pray The Lord's Prayer....

Our Father who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,

on earth as it is in Heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power

and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.