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How many of you have ever been in a fight or argument with someone you love...whether it be a spouse or partner or parent or friend or child? I think we can safely assume that every one of us here have and more than once. As you think back to those, I want you to try to remember a disagreement that was really hard when you were in the middle of it. Maybe it lasted hours or even over the course of several days or weeks. Maybe there were raised voices and tears and a roller coaster of emotions. But when you came through it...when you got to the other side and to a place of reconciliation, everything was actually so much better. The conflict was necessary to get to a different place, a place actually healthier than where you were before.

It may seem strange for me to compare a blowout conflict between you and a loved one with the season of Lent, but that's exactly what I am going to attempt to do this morning. Lent is all about being honest about ourselves, shortcomings and all. Being honest about the way we have hurt others. It's about re-ordering our priorities. And putting God and relationship first above those unhealthy things that tempt us, like money, our image, our accomplishments, trying to acquire more and more, and so forth.

But Lent is also about...and this is important...hearing how much we are loved...about being reminded that God has chosen us and chooses us every day and wants us to live into our fullness of being.

When we have a conflict with someone we love, don't we have to do those very same things if we want to get the relationship right? We have to admit our shortcomings, reorder our priorities, and both remind and be reminded of how much we are loved.

The season of Lent is our time of working on our relationship with God—of admitting that the relationship needs work and acknowledging that we could be a better partner.

Some of you may wonder why we begin worship with the Ten Commandments during Lent. After all, it's a little awkward kneeling and assenting to that litany of rules like not committing murder or adultery. Not stealing or coveting. Not making idols and keeping the sabbath. What's the point of all of it, we might ask?

Relationship and living in community with one another in a healthy way. That's the point. The first four commandments are about who, what and how we worship. They call us to put God first and resist worshipping idols and other Gods. And what are those other things God is worried about us worshipping? These days, we aren't at much risk of worshipping Baal or Asherah or Anat, those competing Gods of the Old Testament. But we do find ourselves tempted by the gods of wealth and power and prestige and lust and beauty, among others.

The fifth commandment, the one that instructs us to honor our parents is an acknowledgement that there is wisdom in learning from those who come before us and understanding and appreciating the past.

And the last five commandments teach us how to live together in community. They address how we deal with anger and our desire for things and people.

Taken all together, the Ten Commandments call us to live into that greatest of all commandments—loving the Lord our God with our entire heart and mind and soul, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

If you remember your Old Testament, you'll remember that it was on Mt. Sinai that Moses heard the voice of God telling him to record these commandments for the Israelite people to follow. And it was on that very same mountain where Moses encountered the burning bush and the voice of God., like we heard in our Exodus reading this morning. It was called Mt. Horeb in that reading, but they are the same. Mt. Sinai and Mt. Horeb are different names for the same mountain.

When Moses heard the voice of God calling to him from that burning bush, he answered, "Here I am." And it was in that sacred space on the mountain where God came down to meet Moses and Moses was commissioned to liberate the people of God. Even though Moses had recently escaped Egypt and the wrath of the Pharaoh, God called him to return and lead the Israelites to freedom.

When Moses finally accomplished that mission, after lots of trials and challenges, do you remember where he would lead the people of Israel once he got them out of Egypt? Right back to this mountain. So that they can come near to God and to hear God's voice. The first thing that Moses

did at Mt. Sinai after the exodus was follow God's instructions to a strike a rock that then poured forth water—living water that sustained the parched Israelites that has been wandering in the wilderness. So first God gave them living water on that mountain and soon after, God would give to Moses the Ten Commandments, the covenant by which the people are called to live together.

Why insist on rules right after the Israelites have been freed? Because liberation is not just about being free. True liberation requires acknowledging responsibility. And that's why the Commandments are so important. More than three thousand years ago, they instructed the Israelites to live in a way that made them accountable to God and to their neighbors, to their community. And today, they instruct us to do the same.

Again, I ask you to think back to working through a difficult time in an important relationship. When we love someone, that love cannot be founded on coercion. We must be free. And yet, we must also be accountable to those we love...to seek their happiness and fulfillment as much as our own.

This season of Lent is our time to work on our relationship with God. To seek the reconciliation that we all need. And maybe this seems like a waste of time in these difficult days when it can feel like the world is pulling apart at the seams. But the world doesn't change until we change.

And during these weeks, we hear the stories calling us to be God's people. We hear stories of liberation. Today's Gospel calls us to bear fruit for God.

Next Sunday, we'll hear the parable of the Prodigal Son telling us of God's boundless love and mercy. These are the stories that make us who we are. That tell us what it means to call ourselves Christians. That help us to see how much God loves us and what God wants from us.

And so during this season of Lent, we'll turn toward God and pledge a better way forward, admitting our failures and seeking the path that leads to God and a relationship founded on love, on freedom and on accountability to and care for our neighbor. It may not be easy, just as struggling for reconciliation with our loved ones is never easy. But it's necessary if we want to come to a better place, if we want to more fully experience God's welcome and love. Amen.