

Bible Study: Lent 3 (B) – March 7, 2021

Exodus 20:1-17

The recitation of the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, will likely be familiar to listeners of this week's Old Testament reading, and many might have images of a technicolor Charlton Heston descending from the mountain, tablets in hand. But what's striking in this reading is that God—not Moses—is speaking directly to the Israelites. Hearing directly from the Divine would have left quite an impact on these former Egyptian slaves as they made their way through the desert.

There's an order to the commandments as well—get in right relationship with God (the first four commandments) and then you can be in right relationship with each other (the remaining six). The directives aren't meant to micro-manage our lives, but to apply constant pressure, the pressure of discipleship and formation, that can continue to guide us toward a life that is in right relationship with God, creation, and each other.

- Where are some areas where we are individually or collectively out of synch with God's directives?
- What are some small practices that we might initiate to help re-form our lives to be in better relationship with God and with each other?

Psalm 19

The Psalmist is in utter awe of the power of God and the perfection of God's law. The first six verses illustrate God's vast control over all of creation and the next four verses describe the "perfect," "clear," and "true" actions of God that make a relationship with God more desirable than wealth or sweet honey. The Psalmist ends with a plea to God to cleanse, protect, strengthen, and redeem the speaker because the Psalmist knows that nothing is beyond God's realm or "hidden from its burning heat." The Psalmist understands that as a human creature, he is not perfect and instead is susceptible to sins, both known and unknown. The Psalmist does not ask for God's forgiveness, but rather petitions for God to work with the Psalmist so the Psalmist is not overtaken by sins. The Psalmist understands that our faith invites us into an active relationship with God where we are constantly invited to reflect, repent, and grow nearer to God.

- Read the Lent 3 collect. How is our petition similar to that of the Psalmist?
- How is Psalm 19 similar or different from the Book of Common Prayer's confession?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

When looked at from the outside—as many of the Greeks and Jews of Corinth would have seen them—these Christ believers had an “upside-down” view of reality.

Weakness is strength and death is salvation. The Apostle Paul highlights the paradox of the cross and establishes a neat dichotomy to drive unity for the church in Corinth: be among those who are perishing or with those who are living. Who wouldn't choose life, under the circumstances?

Paul is trying to mend a divided church in Corinth, where the wealthy members, lured by the Corinthian ideal of clever oratory (and possibly disappointed with Paul's own admitted mumblings) are tempted to segregate from their poorer counterparts and create their own ideal of church. Paul recognizes that they are missing the point. He forces them—and us—to stare directly into the shame and tragedy of the cross and, in so doing, put all humankind on equal footing. None of us is greater than another—no matter what our earthly skills or accomplishments might suggest—and all are far weaker than God's apparent weakness and more foolish than God's seeming foolishness.

- What divisions do we still see that threaten to divide us today? How might a Divine view of things yield solidarity across division?

John 2:13-22

The sellers and moneychangers were in the courtyard of the temple selling the items devout Jews, particularly those who had travelled far and could not bring along animals, needed to perform the necessary sacrifices. Unlike the other three gospels, however, the focus of this story in John is not about the impropriety of turning the temple into a marketplace or the extortionary or dishonest practices of the sellers and moneychangers (the other gospels refer to them as “robbers”).

John's gospel contains a series of signs that show who Jesus is, and this is the second one, occurring immediately after the wedding at Cana. The Jewish observers of this event were correct in perceiving Jesus' actions as a threat to the sacrificial system of the temple. John uses this event to indicate who Jesus is and what he has come to do. Jesus tells them that he himself is the replacement of the temple. The temple's purpose was to be the place of God's presence among his people; Jesus is now that place. The temple was the place where sacrifices were performed, especially at Passover. Jesus will be the final, perfect Passover sacrifice. Jesus fulfills the purpose of the temple, rendering it obsolete.

- How would you have reacted if you had been at the temple that day?