

Lent 3, March 7, 2021 (Jo 2:13-22; Ps 19; Ex 20:1-17; I Cor 1:18-25) SERMON

The holy gospel according to John, the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

***When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" His disciples recalled that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Psalm 69:9).***

***The Jews then asked him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." They replied, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*** The gospel of the Lord.

This is a teaching sermon, with a brief reflection on each of the four readings.

**Part 1: Exodus** What's the first thing you think of when someone mentions the Ten Commandments? I'm thinking of a phrase with three words. (It starts with *Thou*.) *Thou shalt not*.

Hear the *good news* in this text. In the *first* commandment, God reveals the foundation of his relationship with us: **I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.**

That deliverance, that "passing over" of the angel of death, was a living reminder of how much God loved his people: he delivered them from some 400 years of bondage in Pharaoh's brickyard.

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As Christians, we believe the Ten Commandments are a *light to our path*, showing us the best way to live as children of God who have already freely received God's grace in Jesus Christ. The Ten Commandments are a *gift*, inviting us to live with one another in community, in relationship, as moral human beings.

**Part 2, 1st Corinthians** Paul writes: **The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing**—those who don't know the uncomplicated love of Jesus—**but to us who are being saved it's the power of God**. Here's the problem: our God let himself be *crucified*. Our God allowed himself to be defeated. Our God washed our feet and then *died* for us. *What kind of God would do that???*

Here's the historical context. The Hebrew language is a language of *story*. The Hebrew scriptures don't always present *facts*. Sometimes they tell *truths*. And sometimes—perhaps *often*—truth is *bigger* than fact. There are truths that can't be expressed in words. Thus Paul wrote, **The Jews demand signs**. They were looking for displays of divine power, *miracles*, to deliver them from their oppressors.

But the Greeks of the New Testament period were a people of learning and logic. They sought explanations they could understand. They wanted to be able to identify every cause and effect. In the words of Paul, **Greeks look for wisdom**. Their ideal “god” would use natural processes, drawn from or modeled on nature or logic, to relieve the problems of the world.

Any way you look at it, from a worldly perspective it doesn't make sense for God to die. The sign-seeking Jews wanted religious miracles as proof of God's power. The cross, for them, was total humiliation. For the wisdom-loving Greeks, a God who allowed himself to be killed wouldn't be worth worshiping. How could a dead God be of any use to them? Therefore, wrote Paul, **Christ crucified was a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles**—all those who weren't Jews, specifically here, the Greeks.

Jesus, the Savior of our souls, came to *seek and save the lost*. He accomplished that by identifying himself with the last, the least, the little, the lonely; the outcast, the scapegoat, the unloved, the unlovable. **For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**

**Part 3, John** Today's gospel raises a contextual question. Why were there money-changers in the temple? Because the whole system of Judaism revolved around blood sacrifice to atone for sins or to thank God for blessings. The animals prescribed for each type of sacrifice could be purchased in the Temple courtyard. When faithful Jews from all over the Middle East traveled to Jerusalem on pilgrimage, they brought their own money but rarely their own animals. So the bankers would exchange foreign coins for local ones—and of course they always charged a fee.

This system of animal sacrifice in exchange for blessing was an Old Testament command from God. But in Jesus, God was doing a new thing! As he stormed through the temple, cleaning out the old ways, Jesus was foreshadowing the drastic change in how salvation would come about.

No longer would sins be atoned for by blood sacrifice; no longer would salvation have to be *purchased*. The blood of Jesus, freely shed on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, completely did away with the need for temple sacrifice of purchased animals.

**Part 4, Psalm 19** Steve Garnaas-Holmes reflects on verse 12: **Who can detect their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.**

*God, I do not even know the ways I distance myself from you. . . . I can't suspect the ways I hurt you, fall short of your desire for me, fail to be who you lead me to be. I believe the little lies I tell myself; I bow to my secret fears. I don't even know what it would be like to love as I have been loved.*

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*I miss the hurt I cause more often than I notice it. I share in people's wounding and unfreedom in ways I can't see. Forgive me, for I do not know what I am doing. Forgive me for not knowing. Forgive my hidden sins, the sins I hide from myself. If they can't be removed, at least bring them out of hiding. Let me see just how immense is the forgiveness I need, the forgiveness you offer. O God, I receive your love without even knowing why.*

Pastor Steve sums up the sinfulness of us all: we fail to recognize how totally and completely we are loved. We fail to recognize that in Jesus, God has removed every barrier between us and his mercy.

We fail to give thanks for the abundant life, both now and in eternity, that Jesus died to give us.

And that, ultimately, is the *good news*, the *best news*, of the gospel: in spite of our deepest sin against God, he loves us totally and fully. He freely fulfills our deepest needs: forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, the salvation of our souls.

Forgive us, Lord! Thanks be to God.