

## **Third Sunday in Lent**

**March 7, 2021**

Year B RCL

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; John 2:13-22

**“Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”**

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The relationship with God requires a behavior in which outwardly and inwardly each person manifests how much they know and obey God. Without this commitment and unity, the spiritual life could be reduced to a religious empty ritual. To increase our understanding about the necessity of harmony between the body and the spirit, the journey of Lent takes us to consider the texts of the Ten Commandments in the book of Exodus and the cleaning of the temple in the gospel of John.

These two texts have the same importance, meaning, and obligation they had at the time these events occurred. They both denounce a form of dualism in which people disconnect the private from the public life. This spiritual anomaly among others also happens currently, and confines the connection with God as

one of the many relationships human beings have, but not as exclusive and unique on how in reality the relationship needs to be.

For this reason, the words from Exodus we hear today, “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol” are as necessary for us today as they were for the people of Israel. These words call for us to place God at the center of our lives not as an occasional, limited, or marginal relationship, but at the very heart. In some sense we can say that when we only worship God for an hour on Sunday, we are somewhat disconnected, or maybe partially connected in body, mind, or spirit because we are dedicating more time and resources during the other days of our week for someone else, and not for God that owns our life.

When God spoke to the people of Israel, he mentions to them, “I am the Lord your God” to remind them of his nature and the relationship he has with them as Lord and God. This demonstrates that grace comes before the law. For this reason, he deserves being first all the time, and he is always the center light that illumines all the human realities.

The people of Israel who pass from slavery to freedom receive the Ten Commandments as a set of requirements from God to enjoy their freedom.

These instructions are an invitation to develop a lifestyle in response to God's love and faithfulness with him. This lifestyle is of liberty and love where people make choices and accomplish them in and with responsibility as children of God. We usually consider or think the Ten Commandments as the "do and do not" actions in life and reduce them as a moral code from the Old Testament forgetting that in 2021 and for all time, the Commandments continue being an expression of the desire of God for us to have a healthy and good relationship with him and others.

I invite you to dream with me with your eyes open: imagine for a moment that the society in which we live and are part of, there are not any murderers, not any liars, not any adulterers, not any thieves, no one is greedy, and no one is envious. Imagine that children honor, respect, and obey their parents in every moment, and that there is time during the week to dedicate one whole day to love ourselves and to love God, and to be devoted to God as the lover of our soul.

Now, please wake up from this wonderful dream. This society is not impossible to attain, but it does however require from everyone to put our priorities in good order. God always needs to be first and at the very center of our life. We have changed the order and continue to put ourselves or "others gods" or idols first. Our society is not an expression of the Ten Commandments, instead it is a

place where ego (self) and individualism are promoted and celebrated. Society's overall priorities right now are power, money, recognition, control, and many others which in some way show that we are the modern slaves of Egypt. In this sense, today's reading about the commandments is a denouncing of how we reduce our lives into an existence without freedom as consequence of the failure to obey God's commandments.

In a similar manner we hear in the gospel of John today, that Jesus displays with determination an unusual character unknown by many. Jesus' reactions of fury and vehemence demand the respect for the temple which he calls his "Father's house". "Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables."

The temple is an institution for the people of Israel that combine the religious and political spectrum. Both the Roman Empire along with the religious system of the Jews profit from the temple. The people of Israel use the sacrifices of animals and offerings to worship God; and the Israelites believed and understand God's presence in the temple. It is through the temple that the Israelites enter in communion with God.

The fact that John mentioned that this event happened when “the Passover of the Jews was near” suggests that Jesus is anticipating the new Passover in which there is not need for the sacrifice of animals, because Jesus himself would be offered in sacrifice as the Lamb of God. Jesus’ cleaning of the temple is a direct judgment on the religious system that had become corrupt and trapped in rituals where those who make an offering and those who offer the sacrifices feel secure and justified for their actions. The sacred space where God lives has become a marketplace. In the same way how we observed from the Ten Commandments, also here the change in the relationship with God is the result of human behavior.

After the cleaning of the temple, Jesus in an assertive manner refers to his body as the new temple. This means that more than a physical building or a church proper, the new sanctuary *IS* Jesus. If we want to be in communion with God we need to come to Jesus. For all of us in 2021, the message of the gospel continues beings the same, it is about Jesus more than the space where we worship. We have learned from the Covid-19 pandemic that the church is the people that connect with God and intentionally make room for him.

Equally as we conclude for the Ten Commandments that the relationship with God is ultimately obedience and priorities. The marketplace of the temple does

not bring the True God, it only brings the idol or god of convenience that we have created.

As we continue the journey of the cross during Lent, I remind you of the letter to the Corinthians where Paul says, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). Yes, this is exactly what we are, living temples of God by our baptism. Do not permit that the marketing and profit mentality of the world lead the temple you are and destroy the image and likeness of God in you. Without excuse, clean your own holy temple and obey enough to put God first before anything or anybody. Amen.