

Guidance

Bible Readings

(You might also want to look up Psalm 19)

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labour and do all your work. ¹⁰But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

John 2: 13-22

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables.

¹⁵Making 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. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' ¹⁹Jesus



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answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ ²⁰The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Hear what God's Spirit is saying to the church.

Thanks be to God

Reflection

Creator God, you have given us guidelines of how we can be in community together. Help us to follow your loving laws, praise you more faithfully and live more justly, so we might be more faithful disciples living in a deeper relationship with you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent 3, 7 March 2021, p.48

Today's readings invite us to think about how we look to God for guidance.

We have heard again the 10 Commandments, deeply familiar words, offered to guide our living not just as individuals but as a community;

offered to us with the fundamental reminder that this comes from the same God who rescued God's people from slavery, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2).

This same God now seeks to set them on a path that will distinguish them from other peoples and nations, not in a discriminatory sort of way, but in a way that reflects who God is and what God intended for God's people and, indeed, for all of God's creation.

These Commandments have guided God's people for millennia - a framework for the life of God's people.

And from within this framework comes Jesus.

Jesus is shaped by these laws.

Jesus lived inside this framework...

And in the midst of his teaching and healing ministry we have this incident in the temple.

In the accounts attributed to Matthew, Mark and Luke, this incident is recorded towards the end of Jesus' ministry. It is presented as the thing that finally sent the religious authorities over the edge and into outright hostility towards Jesus. In Mark's gospel, Jesus only goes to Jerusalem once. He enters triumphantly on a donkey with everyone waving palm branches, and then he goes to the temple and creates chaos. This is the story that sets the scene for Holy Week and Jesus' final few days before his arrest and death.

But for John, whose account we read today, this incident is presented right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In John's gospel, Jesus turns water into wine somewhere close to home (we all like that one! - John 2:1-11), he goes to Capernaum with his family (John 2:12) and then he heads up to Jerusalem and turns the tables over in the temple (John 2:13-22). John presents Jesus as participating in the usually joys and celebrations of life in community and then immediately confronting us with the Jesus who will challenge the status quo and the power of the religious leaders and the leaders of the [Roman] Empire.

Let's take a moment to “notice” parts of this story.

In clearing the temple, Jesus clears the space where Gentiles would usually gather. Gentiles were not allowed into the inner part of the temple so in some ways this was clearing the only space the Gentiles had to pray in the temple.

In clearing the temple, Jesus challenges the economics of exploitation. The temple was a thriving economy in and of itself and while there was some need for money changers and the selling of animals for the sacrifices, particularly for travellers who may have journeyed some distance to participate in the Passover festival, it had become exploitative.

In clearing the temple, Jesus turned over the tables of the money changes and drove out sheep and cattle. But he told the dove sellers to remove the birds - the scriptures don't say he released them - that would likely kill them. He simply told their owners to get them out.

So what might we take from this?

How does our community here show itself to be living within God's framework of life for us?

What might we need to learn or change in the way we relate to one another or to God in order that we better reflect the people God calls us to be?

In terms of this incident in the temple, do we ban all buying and selling on church property? I don't think so - Jesus was concerned about exploitation. If our buying and selling at the Trading Table (or anywhere else) becomes exploitative, then we have a problem, but when we are seeking to raise funds for the offering of ministry and to support people in our community and beyond who are vulnerable and struggling, I don't think that's a problem.

Should we rail or take action against exploitative economics? Absolutely.

Any system that makes the poor poorer and the rich richer is a system we should be challenging. We may not have the capacity to create as much chaos as Jesus did, but we certainly have the capacity to make choices in our own purchasing that ensures that the goods we buy have not been produced through the use of slave labour, or to ensure that the producers of whatever it is we are buying have received a fair portion of the end purchase price. For example, as we approach Easter, might we pay attention to the origins and price paid for raw materials in our choice of chocolate eggs. (see <https://beslaveryfree.com> and <https://guide.ethical.org.au/guide/browse/guide/?type=126>)

We also have the capacity to continue to lobby our governments to ensure that the needs of the people who are the most vulnerable in our communities are not overlooked. Whether that be in holding governments accountable to responding to the Aged Care Royal Commission, or ensuring people receive a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, or that people who are unemployed or unable to work through illness or disability are supported in a way that ensures their human dignity.

I think, also, that we have an obligation to protest and take action when the environment suffers because of our exploitation of natural resources - when our desire for cheap goods or a more comfortable existence means that the planet is crying out, we need to stop and rethink our priorities. Whether it is palm oil, paper products or the use of petroleum or coal, do we consider the impact on the environment as we consider which products we purchase?

Sometimes such action is costly - perhaps we need to pay more for the goods and services we enjoy; perhaps we have to miss out on something we would like, choosing not to purchase rather than support the exploitation we see; perhaps our friends and family might think us a bit weird... but that is the way of the cross for the disciples of Jesus Christ. It is a road that is sometimes deeply challenging and costly - but always, always, it leads us to renewal and life.

Let's pray...

God of all Creation, open our eyes to see and our ears to hear when your creation is hurting, when your people are suffering. Fill us with the anger of Jesus to confront injustice and broken systems. Hold us when the path becomes difficult and bring us ever closer to you so that we, along with all your creation, may reflect your glory in our living. Amen.