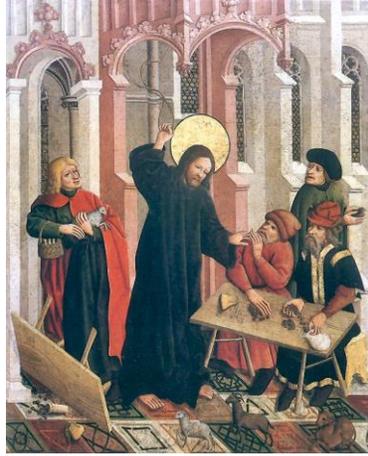


Journeying through the Revised Common Lectionary
Readings, Commentary, and Discussion Questions for March 4, 2018
Third Sunday in Lent



THE READINGS

First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17

¹Then God spoke all these words:

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

⁴You 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. ⁵You 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.

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

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹Six days you shall labor 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.

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

¹³You shall not murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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

Worth Noting: What is the hardest commandment to honor? For many it must be "Remember the sabbath day and keep it holy." Does your community attempt to honor the sabbath? How?

Psalm 19

- ¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
- ² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
- ³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
- ⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
- In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
- ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.
- ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
- ⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
- ⁹ the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.
- ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.
- ¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
- ¹² But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
- ¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
- Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Worth Noting: Psalm 19 moves from praise of the creator's creation, to praise for the Law, and then to prayer, the human response to God's action and instruction. Is thanksgiving your response to God's commandments?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Worth Noting: Paul disparages attempts at human wisdom to deal with eternal truths. To where and to whom do you turn for wisdom in ordering your life and your values?

Gospel: John 2:13-22

¹⁸ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!”

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?”

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

²⁰ The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”

²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After 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.

Worth Noting: Jesus, the Gospels tell us, spent much time in Galilean synagogues, probably accommodating 20 or so people. This would have supported a degree of intimacy unavailable in the Jerusalem temple. How does your community balance the needs for large worship spaces with a need for personal intimacy?

CONNECTING WITH THE SCRIPTURES

Entering into the Scriptures

A deeply puzzling question that has engaged thoughtful readers for generations is “Just exactly what did the Roman and Jewish authorities have against Jesus?” His teachings certainly were well within the spectrum of teachings acceptable to first century Jews. It must have been difficult to justify crucifying one who healed lepers, restored sight to the blind, and even raised the dead to life. What about Jesus provoked animosity?

Two possibilities present themselves in the Gospels. The first is tied to the inscription placed on Jesus’ cross: “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.” Despite the Gospel’s record of Jesus’ protestations, there may have been those who wished to make Jesus an earthly king. For instance, in last week’s Gospel, this appears to have been the intent of Peter who rebuked Jesus for foretelling an ignominious death rather than a glorious final act. If the Romans had any inkling that some Jews wanted him crowned, they would have had no compunction in eliminating that threat. The Jewish authorities, rather than risk widespread bloodshed, may have acquiesced in this execution.

A second possibility is related to this week’s Gospel selection. All four Gospels recall the incident of “driving the moneylenders from the Temple.” Here was an act bound to upset all of the authorities, Jewish and Roman. Jewish authorities would have found it disruptive of the very essence of the Religion of Israel. The Romans wanted everything peaceful. Disruptions to the status quo and riots in the principle city of the province would have prompted swift and sure punishment.

Did Jesus in fact drive moneylenders and sellers from the Temple? Some find it implausible that one person could ever have done this and question the episode’s historicity. On the other hand, the Gospels remember Jesus as positioning himself in contrast to the temple authorities, aligned with Israel’s prophetic strain (see, for example, Mark 1:1-4). Always there was a tension between the relatively undisciplined, Spirit-driven prophets and the Temple authorities intent on maintaining critical institutions. (Recall Isaiah 1:11-17 denouncing sacrifices unaccompanied by proper care for the widow, the orphan, and the alien.) Disparaging the efficacy of the sacrificial system established in the Torah by Moses himself would not have endeared Jesus to many in Jerusalem. Could it be that the Cleansing of the Temple was used as symbol of this antagonism between Jesus and the Jerusalem establishment?

What’s Lent About, Anyway?

A Lenten reading of the Ten Commandments seems perfectly appropriate. But a story about chasing the money lenders from the Temple – just as finance committees are gearing up for the big Easter Sunday collections – what does that have to do with Lent? Why have a reading about disregarding rules and disrupting the religious and economic life of a city? We know that people coming to the Temple needed the assistance of the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals to fulfill the holy rituals. Were the merchants really causing any more disruption than Girl Scouts selling cookies or the church gardeners selling produce in church halls?

For us, more important than the question of the historical accuracy of the “Cleansing of the Temple,” is this juxtaposition of commandments: We must both respect the legitimate

demands of civil society and follow our individual conscience. Doing both has been a struggle for Christians from the start, as witnessed by Paul's teaching in Romans 13. Some Christians, like the Amish, opt to form alternative societies as independent of the majority society as possible. Most of us, however, pay taxes to a country that both wages war and feeds and cares for impoverished families around the world.

Questions for Discussion

The Hebrew Scriptures include many thanksgivings for the Law. Contemporary people generally prefer loose or no rules. How do you set up rules for your own life? If you have children, how do you regulate (or attempt to regulate) their lives?

When would you prefer an intimate worship service and when a spectacular ritual with religious pomp and circumstance?

Are there issues for which you would engage in civil disobedience?



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