

3 Lent Yr B, 4/03/2018
Exod 20:1-17; 1 Cor 1:18-25; Jn 2:13-22
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“Brief reflections on the Commandments, the cross, and the temple cleansing”

God’s love for us; our love for God; and our love for neighbour; right relationships with God and neighbour—that’s what all three of our Bible passages focus on today.

The following story illustrates quite well the importance of practicing our faith when everyone thinks it is offensive, crazy and makes no sense at all: Charlie, Alan, and Lorelei wound up lost on a trip. They stopped to ask for directions. A farmer said, "Haven't been out that way for years, but it's easy. Go straight out this road until you see the big nest, then turn right." Once on the road, they passed a billboard of an eagle. "That must be it," Alan said. "He said the big nest. How about this sign?" Lorelei shook her head. "I'm driving till I see a big nest." "This is ridiculous," Charlie said. "We came from the east, and we're heading south. We'll never get back on track." Lorelei just kept driving -- past the "Big Nest Ranch" and further south, to the boys' chagrin. Suddenly, she slammed on the brakes. "What is it?" the boys exclaimed. Lorelei pointed to a tall tree beside an intersection. There, in the highest branches, was an eagle's nest. To Alan, who expected a bigger sign, it looked puny. Charlie scoffed. "How could that farmer have known that the nest would still be there?" Lorelei turned anyway. Soon enough, they were back on the highway. "How did that happen?" Charlie asked. "I thought we were going the wrong direction!" Lorelei shrugged. "You didn't have a clear sign or logical directions! How did you know it was right?" Alan asked. Lorelei smiled. "I had faith."¹

For many people today the Ten Commandments make no sense at all; are crazy and some are even offended by them. Jesus' death on the cross and God's wisdom being wiser than worldly wisdom; and God's weakness being stronger than worldly strength also makes no sense, is crazy and offensive to many people today. Jesus' cleansing of the temple made no sense, was crazy and offensive to many Jewish leaders, the moneychangers and the merchants selling animals and birds for sacrifices and offerings in the temple. Yet, as foolish, as crazy, as offensive all of these things are; God chooses to work out his ways through them.

The Ten Commandments offer God's people freedom and grace. In the introduction to them, God reminds Israel that he freed them from Egyptian slavery. They are now free people; free to obey God by following the Ten Commandments. The first three Commandments focus on our relationship with God and protect us against serving other, false gods. There is a wonderful promise God gives us in the first Commandment: those who love God and keep the Commandments are going to be blessed with God's steadfast love right up to the thousandth generation—which was another way of God saying they'd be blessed forever.

Commandments four through to ten focus on our relationships with other people—how we are to live together as people in society. They ensure that our name, reputation, spouse, children, and property are all protected and respected. Of course we are all sinners and cannot perfectly keep the Ten Commandments. However they function like a prosecuting lawyer; and a mirror; showing us where we go wrong and how we sin; and then causing us to flee to Jesus to ask for his love and forgiveness.

So the apostle Paul, in our 1 Corinthians passage reminds us that after the Commandments do their work by driving us to Jesus; then we discover the high price that God had to pay by offering us a new beginning. Paul reminds us that when Christ willingly suffered and died on the cross God's foolishness and weakness resulted in the forgiveness of our sins and the promise of new, eternal life. What many in the world regard as foolishness and weakness; God shows us his wisdom in foolishness and his power in weakness on the cross. That is why the cross will always be a scandal, a stumbling block and utter nonsense to many. Yet to those who hear this gospel message preached and believe it; God through Jesus' suffering and death offers us forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life.

Suffering love and humble service are greater than selfish greed, wealth, worldly power and fame. Jesus' life, ministry, suffering and death were all about suffering love, humble service and direct access to God—that's why Jesus cleansed the temple.

If you are ever around cattle, one of the things you learn pretty quickly not to do is to walk between a mother cow and her calf. She is likely to become downright belligerent. You become a threat to her baby, and she won't stand for that. The sight of a full-grown cow charging is awesome. It's also one that you don't want to see again. In a way, God is like a mother cow. He is patient and kind and forgiving and all that. But heaven help the person who comes between God and his children.

Those moneychangers made a mistake of coming between God and his children. The people who came to the temple expecting a quiet place to pray and offer their sacrifices, instead found a marketplace, with people loudly haggling over the price of the offerings and the exchange rate of coins. Jesus

was so angered by their interfering with the worship of the people that he took a whip and charged after them. It must have been an awesome sight and one they would not ever want to see again.²

Jesus, by cleansing the temple was engaged in a prophetic act; showing the people that there was a new way to access God directly; a new way that put an end to sacrificing and offering animals and birds in the temple. A new way ending the old sacrificial system; yet in harmony with what was old by reaffirming the importance of the first three Commandments to love the LORD God and worship him only; and reaffirming the other seven Commandments by not exploiting other people and by loving your neighbour as yourself.

This prophetic act of Jesus connects the dots of his quote in verse nineteen: “zeal for your house will consume me,” here understood as a prediction of his death and resurrection. The Jewish leaders misunderstand Jesus’ words about the temple; Jesus was referring to his own body and his resurrection.

By connecting the temple cleansing taking place around the time of the Passover; which was the Jewish festival celebrating freedom from Egyptian slavery; Jesus was connecting it with the freedom that comes through God’s act of grace by giving the Ten Commandments as a sign of freedom to love and serve God and neighbour. Furthermore, by referring to the suffering, death and resurrection of his body; Jesus is affirming what Paul is preaching—the power of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross to set us free from sin. Thanks be to God for this freedom through Jesus and the cross.

1 *Emphasis* online at: <www.sermonsuite.com>.

2 *Emphasis: A Preaching Journal for the Parish Pastor* Vol. 23, No. 6, March-April 1994 (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., Inc.), p. 15.