

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer (Ps. 19:14).



If Jesus were to appear here at St. John's, what tables would he want to overturn? Apathy perhaps- coming to church once a month (or two)- and feeling proud that you are active in your church? Maybe so but does that kind of in-and-out attendance and participation really give you the deep down community that being part of a congregation can give you?

Or, making an idol of sports teams such that you can't be here on Sunday mornings because there is a game. And I **do** understand that some coaches hold practices on Sunday, or games are scheduled on Sundays – and if a

child misses a practice then he or she may not be allowed to play. It's a tension in our world where church doesn't mean much –if anything- to those who are not churched.

Or perhaps a sense of entitlement: this is “our building,” “our church” – “my pew.” Does that sound familiar to any of us? And then the question we have batted around a bit in years past: if a tornado destroyed this building, would we rebuild and how. What's really important to worshipping God? What makes St. John's St. John's so that if we were no longer to exist as we are now, somebody would miss us.

I'm reminded of a plaint said by someone who retired after 40+ years with a company and who had been lauded as integral to their success. He retired, had a nice lunch, but within a couple of months, everything was going along swimmingly without him. It really did appear that he was integral. And he lost his sense of who he was and his place in the world when he was no longer integral to that company. And within a year he died. In our world today, what is our identity? Who and what do we hold onto as the core of our being? What gives us meaning?

The “Ten Commandments”, known in Judaism as the “Ten Words” or “God's Teachings” give us a framework for our life with God and with neighbor. They are all about relationship. George Stroup says that “one of the central convictions of Jewish and Christian faith is that human life is to be lived before God and that such life has an order and structure.”¹ We human beings generally like order and structure, at least to a certain degree. We know that children function better when parents set guidelines and keep to them. We know a certain number of hours of sleep are imperative for children to function well in school. And, we are learning how important sleep is for adults as well.

¹ George Stroup in Feasting on the Word, Year B, vol. 2 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 74.

Order, rhythm, structure. Those concepts underlie our scripture readings this morning. The readings help us learn the truths God's word imparts and to so take God's word into our hearts that our actions and the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts become so ingrained in our very being that we act without having to stop and consciously think about the truths of our relationships with God and with neighbor.

The teachings of God as reflected in what we call the Ten Commandments lead to a life that is best for us and best for our neighbor. They allow us to live free, even as that seems a bit of a paradox given the translation from Hebrew into Latin in English and the repeated "you shall not." If we follow these teachings, we are freed from many of the sins which beset us: envy, greed, anger, bitterness, sloth. We have a relationship with our neighbor that allows each of us to flourish and to utilize our God given gifts in ways that promote the well-being of all of creation. We do not have to wonder, as many of us did as children, whether our parents – or God – love our brother or sister more than our parents - or God – loves us.

John Calvin, the French theologian and pastor, said that the law has three uses: mirror, fence and guide. The mirror shows us our sin, judges us and drives us to Christ. The fence helps us restrain the spread of evil. As a guide, the law is a gift that helps us live life as a Christian.²

Jesus' cleansing of the temple is a reminder that we need to consider our usual practices in light of God's redeeming love for us. One common reflection on this passage in the Gospel of John is that Jesus opposed the money lenders for greed in overcharging people coming to the Temple who needed to exchange their ordinary money for Temple money. Since ordinary money was minted by the Roman Empire, it was unclean and thus could not enter the Temple. Thus, the exchange was necessary for the person to purchase a sacrificial animal, enter the Temple and receive God's blessing.

Another reflection on this passage is that Jesus was reminding the people that the system of sacrifice was no longer necessary.³ In John 1: 1-4 we read:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

Because Jesus is incarnate- God with us in human flesh- Jesus says the Temple is no longer necessary as the place where God resides. God is in the world and nothing more is needed in terms of building or a sacrificial system that uses animals or grains. For us, the idea that God resides in a specific place and only in that place may seem strange. For us, the idea of having to go up to Jerusalem (or fill in the location) to meet religious obligations seems strange. But for the people of the time, that was how they understood God and their obligations to God.

In this as in so many other ways, Jesus upsets the apple cart and essentially says "look, there is a new way. I am God in the flesh. Open your eyes. Those that have ears, listen." And using

² Charles Wiley in Feasting, 84.

³ Karoline Lewis, "Sermon Brainwave", www.workingpreacher.org February 28, 2015 and associated commentary.

Exodus 20: 1-7; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25; John 2:13-22

contemporary language: “Think outside the box.” What matters most is your relationship with God: I am the Lord your God. Have no other gods besides me. What matters second is your relationship with all of creation: Honor your mother and father. Do not murder. Do not commit adultery. Do not covet or steal or bear false witness. Do these things and you will live a life that is in accord with God’s love for you and this life will free you to be the best that you can be.

You may have heard it before, and it is worth remembering. When you arrive in heaven, God will not ask you why you were not more like Andrew or James or John or anyone other than you. God will ask you why you were not more like you. God wants us to develop into persons who live fully into the person that God has created us to be. And each of us is different- with different gifts and talents that will take us our whole life to discover and live into. We need all our energy and focus to develop into what God has created us to be. Living our lives coveting what others has, or stealing from them – or any other sin- is a waste of the love God has graciously and endlessly bestowed upon us.

In Psalm 19 (v.7-8), we are reminded:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eyes;

It is imperative for our life as Christians that we remember that God’s teachings are designed to help us live into the person that God wishes us to be. We are capable of living a fuller and more fruitful life when we love God and love neighbor. So, too, for the church. When the church focuses on loving God and loving neighbor, the church becomes what it is most possible: a community that spreads the gospel to all with whom we come into contact. In the words of William Watkins Reid:

**Help us, O Lord, to live
the faith which we proclaim,
that all our thoughts and words and deeds
may glorify thy name.⁴**

Amen.

⁴ William Watkins Reid, Jr. Hymnal 1982 “Help us, O Lord, to learn the truths”.

3 Lent

Exodus 20: 1-7; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25; John 2:13-22

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