

3-7-2021 3rd Lent

Welcome to our third Sunday of Lent, here in the month of March.

Surrounded by the glories of spring we are praying this day, of course, that our lives would be renewed like the earth, so we can blossom forth with the wisdom, compassion and grace of God. Let us begin the name of the Holy One, Abba Imma, Son, Holy Spirit. Amen.

Pour out upon us, O God, like the sunlight that warms the earth, your mercies which warm our hearts that we may continue to grow strong, loving, and wise in your precious presence. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

We have marvelous, marvelous texts for today. The first is from **Exodus**, the book of *Yetsiah*, the flourishing of life, and the gifting of what's traditionally called the Ten Commandments. [Exodus 20: 1-17]

God spoke these words to the people.

'I am God, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of that life of slavery.

Therefore have no other gods, only Me. No carved gods of any size, shape, or form, anything whatsoever, whether they can fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them, don't serve them because I am God, and I am your God.

No using the name of God, your God in curses or silly banter. (God simply won't put up with the irreverent use of My holy name.)

Observe the Sabbath--keep it holy. Work six days, do everything you need to do, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to God, your God. Don't do any work, not you, your son, your daughter, your servant, your maid, your animals. Not even the foreigners, refugees among you. For in six days, I made heaven and earth and the sea, and everything in them. And on the seventh day, God rested.

Therefore God has blessed the Sabbath day. Set it apart as a holy day. Rest. Honor your father and mother, so that you live a long time in the land that God, your God, has given you.

No murder, adultery, stealing, no lies. No lies about your neighbors. No lusting after your neighbor's house, wife, servant, maid, ox, donkey. Don't set your heart on anything that is your neighbors'.'

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A few comments: this story is the first portion of the Scriptures that were written. It's the key, core story--the whole of Judaism--our being set free. And this liberation story, the first recorded in human history, has been the most often repeated story of liberation movements throughout history and around the world. Everyone knows this story. In fact, the night before he died, Martin Luther King was quoting Moses, "I've been to the mountaintop. I may not get to the Promised Land with you, but I've seen it."

Liberation. Everything. The meaning of the Exodus from Egypt comes to the Hebrew people fifty days after their release. The meaning of what is happening to us always comes later. And that meaning is what's being given in this text for today, and the key elements in Hebrew are actually called the 'Ten Words', not 'Commandments', that makes no sense. That really doesn't.

The Ten Words are those which strike us at the core of our being, wisdom, insights meant to stir us for the honest lives of integrity. And the preface is given by God who says, 'I am the one who freed you from slavery. Don't forget me.' That's the most important part, because 'When you remember me, these are the things by which you will live'. And notice that there is both a commitment to God and to our neighbors.

The Ten Words honoring God:

Watch your mouth; your mouth tells you what your mind's going through.

Honor the Sabbath, rest, remember.

Honor your parents.

Don't kill, commit adultery, steal.

No lying, no lying, and no coveting, no desire for what others have, and then you will be free.

The Eucharist is that moment when Jesus says, '*The Exodus story, the story of Liberation, is who I am, and what I am about.*' That's what the Christian faith is meant to embody and practice. 'This is my life. Remember me. Remember the Exodus, that flourishing of life, which has God's unrelenting commitment.'

One other comment I'd like to share with you today. It's also about the very name used for God most frequently in the Hebrew scriptures. There are actually four names used, but the most utilized is four letters--in English, YHWH.

It is unpronounceable. In the Jewish community, nobody makes an attempt to even speak it. *Yahweh* is how it is most commonly used in English, and that means the past, present, and future tenses of the word *being*, the One who was, is, and will be, all simultaneously wrapped together. This is the name for God. It could be interpreted as the *Holy One of Being*.

It's used more than 6,500 times in the scriptures, and the English translation should use the word "Being", the active, dynamic, pulsating presence of life. That is the name of God who spoke to Moses at the Burning Bush saying: 'This is my name forever. This is my title for all generations.'

And when Jesus teaches us the Lord's Prayer:

'Abba Imma in heaven,' he says, 'Holy be your name', this is what he's referring to. The act: alive, present, pulsating, dancing, spirit of life. Holy be your name, made holy by my life. This is our God, imminent and present, within the whole of creation.

You may know that some words are both nouns and verbs.

Yahweh is one of those, and as a noun, it is feminine.

We really haven't taken that to heart, have we?

What is for sure is that Yahweh cannot be accurately translated as 'Lord'.

Absolutely not. It comes from the Greek word '*Kyrios*', the Latin word '*Dominus*'.

It means to dominate, to domineer, to have lordship over. It has nothing to do with being, life. How did we get translators [who] fear acknowledging these feminine dimensions of God as experienced by the Hebrew Community?

There is another Biblical word '*Adon*', which means Lord or Master, so they clearly could have made this choice, but they discarded that. *Yahweh*, my friends, is always the opposite of Lord. We need to begin taking this to heart, and practicing it, and sharing it with one another. This insight is so powerful. God is the imminent one, who is intimately close and personal with everyone and everything in creation. God cares, got involved, is involved. God embraces us. Aren't we blessed to have such a God?'

The Psalm for today is **Psalm 19**.

[Gary plays on piano and Jeanie Locklear accompanies on flute the hymn from Ash Wednesday bon fire service: "*Lord, You Have the Words of Everlasting Life*"]

*The heavens declare God's grandeur.
Each dawn tells of the beauty;
 each night shines with his grace.
God's truth is subtle,
 baffling the intellect.
God's compassion is fathomless,
 refreshing the soul.
God's love is radiant,
 more precious than finest gold,
 and sweeter than honey from the comb.*

*Help me, O God, be aware of my selfishness,
 but without undue shame or self-judgment.
Let me know that you are always present
 in every atom of my life.
Let my words be rooted in honesty
 and my thoughts lost in your light.
Unnamable God, my essence,
 my origin, my life-blood, my home.*

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Gospel: John 2: 13-18

When the Passover Feast celebrated each spring was about to take place, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem to remember the story of the Exodus. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. The loan sharks were there in full strength. Jesus put together a whip of cords, strips of leather bound together, and he chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and the cattle,

upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, 'Get your things out of here. Stop turning my father's house into a shopping mall. That's when his disciples remembered that scripture, 'Zeal for your house consumes me.'

The word of God.

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In the name of the Holy One of Being, Abba Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

This has become one of my favorite texts--this Cleansing of the Temple. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, this is the event which is finally over the top for the authorities, and they set out to kill Jesus with determination. In John's Gospel, the cleansing of the Temple happens at the very beginning.

Why the contrast? Because for John, this overturning of the tables in the Temple is symbolic of all the work that Jesus does throughout the Gospel. He is cleansing everything, everyone, wherever he goes. And the Temple, I remind you friends, is a symbol for the whole of creation. What happens in the Temple should permeate the entire creation--God's gift, God's overwhelming gift to all of us, to all of life. That's why it matters to Jesus. He is by his actions rejecting the Temple culture of sacrifice and external ritual, and saying that the heart of the matter of the relationship with God, is not dependent upon these external observances, but that real religion is about that inner connection of the heart with God and truth and life. It is that direct encounter with God that we all need. It grounds us, centers us, focuses us on what matters in life. Right after this story, Jesus meets with Nicodemus, the old elder who can't understand what Jesus is talking about, and Jesus speaks to him at length about this inner birth that is needed, the inner connection with love.

Jesus encounters, in the course of his lifetime on numerous occasions, the purity code of the times, right? We hear a lot about that today. Are you one of us, are you part of the pure ones? And Jesus, in contrast, violates all of these 'purity rules'. He has no interest in clean food--he's interested in serving the bread of life to everyone, to everyone. All of these ridiculous attempts on our parts to improve, and self-improve, and become maximally perfect are exceedingly boring to God.

You want to do something significant your life? Feed those around you, feed them with every good gift that they need--food, heart, spirit--feed them. That's Jesus' focus.

Well this, of course, led to intense clash with the authorities of his day. And here it becomes even clearer--this driving out the money launderers, the money changers, the loan sharks. He drives them out. *'You are a violation of God's intention for creation.'* This is Jesus theme. He is completing the mission, frankly begun, centuries before, by Isaiah and the other prophets--that *'I desire mercy'* is what God says, *'not sacrifice.'* 'You,' Jesus says, 'have changed God's house into a traders' market. You think this house is a robbers' cave.'

You've heard this, I trust by now, that the richest three Americans have more wealth than the bottom half of the entire population of the United States of America. What do you think Jesus would think of that?

'A den of thieves? No,' Jesus says, 'that is not what God operates.'

And John is the only one [of the Gospel writers] who has Jesus wrapping some cords together, making a whip and driving everyone out, creating a stampede in the Temple. *'Zeal for your house devours me,'* he says. The authorities, of course, are stunned. *'By what authority do you do these things?'*

And he says *'I will bring down this Temple, and in three days raise it up.'*

They did not understand that he was speaking of his body as the Temple. And today, friends, 'Who is the Temple? Where is the Temple?'

We are the Temple; that's where Jesus lodges the very divinity of God. We, as we become the Beloved Community, are the very Temple of Christ's body. That is why this grounding of our inner life is so essential, so that we are connected to the God of being, that dynamic, unfolding, dancing, liberating essence of who we are, and who makes us human.

Well, Lent is the season for us to get clearer, and I'm inviting you once again to nourish your inner life by decluttering what you've become. We all know the clutter, don't we?

God is not outside of us, over there somewhere else to be sought and found. God is not a target that we have to chase after. God wants to live here within each of us, and the invitation of Lent is to make space for God within.

An ancient mystic question has been--'Show me who is the one that is keeping you from being free.' And I will say, we all know the answer is within ourselves. We're just cluttered to the max--the things we don't need, and which block our awareness.

There's no need to go anywhere else this year. You don't have to travel to Jerusalem. The spiritual journey is where you live, it is your heart. It is accepting who we are, and beginning to clear out the space. That's what all the spiritual practices are for--meditation, prayer, the sacraments--so that our inner eye can become clear once again, take out everything that's clogging us, and cluttering the picture. Spiritual cholesterol, that's what it is.

So friends, may we live beyond being consumers, compulsive addicts of credit and cash. May we determine to allow that inner eye to open this Lent with calm, and clarity, and focus, as we cleanse the Temple of our own being so that God may live within. Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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In our prayers for today we remember all these friends in need:

Bob Worthington, Brian, Bob Mantei, Arlene, Stanley, Kyle, George, Fei, Michele, Don, Karen, Drew and Dennis, Ed Klitsch, Dana, Marshall, Doug Schufield, Maili, Dave Vaala, Kelsey, and Joanne Henry.

God in your mercy, hear our prayers.

May the renewal of the spring bring a renewal of our hearts. We pray in Christ's name.

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with favor and give you peace.