

ST. ANDREW'S UNITED CHURCH

Sunday Worship by email
by John Christoffersen

March 7, 2021

Welcome (based on Psalm 19:14)

As we gather for worship this morning, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, Our God, rock and redeemer.

Amen

Hymn: The Lord's Prayer

VU 959

Call to Worship

We gather to proclaim God's handiwork...
the heavens, mountains and deserts, oceans and rivers, days and nights...
the knowledge held deeply by all of nature.

The sun encircles the earth with warmth. Nothing is concealed from this radiance.

The law of God is like the Sun; nothing is hidden from it. It revives our souls and grants us wisdom. What God decrees brings light into our lives. Through the nature of God, we see what is true and righteous. These are things on to which we can firmly hold and keep in covenant with God.

Opening Prayer (based on a prayer of Saint Richard of Chicester)

Dear God, for these three things we pray: to love you more dearly, to see you more clearly, and follow you more nearly everyday.

Amen

Opening Hymn: Be Thou My Vision

VU 642

Prayer of Confession

God's love is steadfast and God's faithfulness endures from age to age.
Let us confess our need for God.
We pray to be forgiven.

Lord, give us enough love and faith to start the journey you have set before us, and enough courage and inspiration to keep going.

In the name of Christ, whose love shows us the way, let us confess our sins and our need for God.

Amen

Assurance of Prayer (based on 1 Corinthians 1:25)

Take heart, for we are acceptable, accepted, free to begin again, and free to run our course with joy.

We Listen for God's Word

Scripture

Exodus 20:1-17

20 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, **6** but 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. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work. **10** But 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. **11** For 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 Honor 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 neighbor.

17 You 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.

Reflection: Finding Profit in Scripture

We know that some portions of scripture are more important than others. Some texts of scripture serve as a key to the understanding of other scripture.

The Ten Commandments is one of the keys to understanding the Old Testament. These are not the words of Jesus, or an apostle, or a prophet. These words are spoken directly by God. Surely the people must sense that something of significance has been spoken to which heed should be given.

The Ten Commandments is God calling us back into balance. It includes commandments that address our behaviour in a community and those that address our personal behaviour. God's word uses the words both as well as and more than the words either and or. Balance comes more often when we bring the various elements of our lives into harmony with one another, similar to the voices in a choir.

The Ten Commandments also remind us that we are God's beloved. Once we experience this love, a natural response is to show more love to God and God's people. In these commandments God shares a way to live this love by acting with honour, truth, dignity, and respect in our worship, our work, and our walk through life.

Moses receives the Ten Commandments as principles of conduct in communal relationships. The intent is to bring about a radical transformation in society, starting with assisting people in getting along with each other and later transforming a ragtag group of people into a nation united under God. The Commandments invite a once enslaved people into new ways of living together.

In the Old Testament, God reveals himself to the people in the midst of fire. A voice was heard but no form was visible.

There is a crucial difference when we reach the New Testament. Now we have the form of a man in Jesus Christ, who radiates in His glory, represents God's nature, and upholds all things by the word of God's power. Now to worship God is to worship Christ.

Yet there exists a similarity between worship in the Old Testament and worship in the New Testament; both are based solely on faith. Yes, it could be said that keeping the Commandments is a matter of our actions and that salvation is a matter of faith.

But the only way to keep the Commandments is to have faith. Obedience to God's law requires faith. To worship God alone is to find him totally trustworthy. To worship God without images is to believe in God's word alone. In both the Old Testament and the New, obedience is only possible on the basis of faith.

Some things never change. Faith is one of those things.

Scripture

John 2:13-22

¹³ 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.

Reflection: Endangered Worship

In this text we find Jesus in an action of angry protest over something precious – true worship.

Jesus perceives that God’s mission has again been frustrated. Seeing people cheated of their money and cheated of their place to worship was infuriating.

Jesus came to the temple to discover that it was not the setting conducive to true worship. The courtyard of the temple smelled like a barnyard. The clink, clink of heavy coins was constant.

Irritated and impatient voices were arguing over the rates of exchange. Even the most righteous Jews would have trouble praying in this place.

It is interesting that this story is found in all four Gospels. Matthew, Mark, and Luke place this story late in the life of Jesus, during the last week of his life. In these Gospels, this story is a crossing point that serves as one of the reasons leading to Jesus’ crucifixion. But John sets this story at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry to show it as a defining point.

Jesus has already, at a wedding, changed six stone jars filled with water (to be used for the rites of purification) into wine. Jesus has overturned a system that had purification, and the ideas of pure and impure as a central tenet. According to Jesus, dead bodies were no longer impure. People with leprosy were no longer impure. Changing water into wine was an act of breaking down a boundary, a different way of seeing the world and God’s presence in it.

The temple is also a hub for this system of purity. The animals being sold in the courtyard are for sacrificial purposes. Money changers became an important part of this system.

Roman coins were considered impure and could not be used to buy sacrifices. The money changers were making a profit for trading, presumably for a price, pure tokens of the faith for impure coins. They were profiting from the people's worship!

Jesus came into the temple not to be destructive or disruptive, but to draw us back to the heart of God. Having possession of sufficient coin of the realm should not separate us from God.

For worship can be lost when we lose a setting which is conducive to worship. Fortunately, we have time to meditate as we serve Communion and take the offering. We have music that takes us into prayer, that draws us out of ourselves in order to experience something of God's holy presence.

But I digress...

As the passage ends, Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The confused Jews respond, "It took 46 years to build this temple. Will you raise it up in three days?"

Then John writes in verse 26, "But He spoke of the temple of the body."

In cleansing the temple, Jesus is also pointing to its replacement. Jesus is saying that genuine worship is when we come to him. Jesus is the new temple where the human encounters the divine. Worship is now focussed in the person of Jesus Christ. He is the temple of God. When we come into the presence of Jesus Christ, he brings us to God.

Jesus overturning the tables in the temple illustrates that the sacrifices that were supposed to have brought people back into a right relationship with God had been distorted by the corruption present in the money changing, by leaders siding with the Roman Empire rather than with their community, and by their chasing power and privilege instead of having the right relationship with God and God's people.

Hymn: Rejoice in the Lord Always

VU 249

We Listen for God's Word

Prayers of the People

We thank you, God, for your stories that spark the imagination, your laws that revive our souls, your commandments that enlighten our hearts, and your traditions that make us thirst for justice.

We thank you for the miracles in our daily lives that renew our spirits and remind us of your steadfast goodness.

We thank you for Jesus of Nazareth, who loved you, your dream, and all your people.

As Jesus wept for his friends, may we also weep with those who cry out in grief, and for those we name to you now. May we also question practices, customs, and traditions that are not in line with your teachings and covenant.

We thank you for this Lenten journey. May we never forget why we journey and what we are journeying towards.

Amen

We Go Out Into God's World

Hymn: Let There Be Light

VU 679

Benediction and Commissioning

Go into the world ready to be kind when others are unkind, and to be passionate when others are complacent.

And may the grace of God, the love of Jesus, and the abiding friendship of the Holy Spirit go with you now and always.

Amen

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