

Third Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, March 3, 2024

### **Introduction to the day**

The third covenant in this year's Lenten readings is the central one of Israel's history: the gift of the law to those God freed from slavery. The commandments begin with the statement that because God alone has freed us from the powers that oppressed us, we are to let nothing else claim first place in our lives. When Jesus throws the merchants out of the temple, he is defending the worship of God alone and rejecting the ways commerce and profit-making can become our gods. The Ten Commandments are essential to our baptismal call: centered first in God's liberating love, we strive to live out justice and mercy in our communities and the world.

### **FIRST READING: Exodus 20:1-17**

A reading from Exodus.

*After escaping from slavery, the Israelites come to Mount Sinai, where God teaches them how to live in community. The Ten Commandments proclaim that God alone is worthy of worship. Flowing from God, the life of the community flourishes when based on honesty, trust, fidelity, and respect for life, family, and property.*

### **PSALM: Psalm 19**

The commandment of the LORD gives light to the eyes. (Ps. 19:8)

### **SECOND READING: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25**

A reading from 1 Corinthians.

*The word of the cross is pure foolishness and nonsense to the world because it claims that God is mostly revealed in weakness, humiliation, and death. But through such divine foolishness and weakness, God is working to save us. The center of Paul's preaching is Christ crucified.*

### **GOSPEL: John 2:13-22**

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>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.

## GOSPEL MESSAGE

### God's Zeal Makes Us Clean

In this penitential season, we hear the words of God's law revealed on Mount Sinai (Exodus 20:1-17). The law was given to guide Israel, newly rescued from slavery in Egypt, to become a community reflecting God's love and holiness. However, this law, no matter how full of love it is, will always carry the sting of accusation for us because our hearts have strayed from God's gracious purpose. We aren't capable of fully following the law because we are still captive to the powers of sin and death, so the commandments will always reveal our trespasses. We should not be surprised that God's word convicts even those who have been called into the community of faith. After all, Jesus cleansed even the temple, reacting against sin within the very heart of religious life.

These scenes on Mount Sinai and in the temple don't just concern people of times long past. They draw us in as well. In the mysteries of holy baptism and holy communion, we become the house of the Lord. Joined to Christ by grace, we are, together, the body of Christ and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is zealous for the holiness of his body, desiring that those who have been united to him would walk in love and truth.

Our great assurance, though, is that the living Word of Jesus is greater even than the revelation on Sinai. Where the law can only convict, Jesus forgives. Where the law reveals our bondage to fear and pride, Jesus brings joyful freedom. In Christ, his body the church dies to sin and then, by grace, rises to new life, made clean and holy.

Let us not fear the one who calls us into holiness and cleanses the temple with zeal. The law reveals where sin has brought death to our souls. But Jesus has passed through death into a glorious resurrection to make us into a living temple, where God's mercy can be found in abundance for us and for the world.

## PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Trusting in God's promise to reconcile all things, let us pray for the church, the well-being of creation, and a world in need.

You alone are God. We thank you for the gift of sabbath rest. Awaken the church to the mystery of your presence and give us glad hearts as we receive the good news of your deliverance. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You renew creation. Drive out those who would make the earth a marketplace. Protect rainforests, mountaintops, oceans, and wilderness areas from commercial exploitation. Unite nations, policymakers, and businesses in efforts to reduce carbon emissions. Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You judge the nations. We pray for an end to war and strife in every land. Strengthen international efforts to negotiate peace and provide humanitarian aid to people fleeing from conflict. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You bring healing and hope. We give thanks for physicians, nurses, researchers, therapists, and public health workers who prevent and treat illness. We pray for any who are sick *especially* Sandra Gagnon, Karen Weigold, Keith Weckwerth, Karen O'Day, Shirley Glickman, Marilyn

Schneider, Denita Wolfgram, Stephanie Yourth, Christopher Yourth, Linda Boland, Peter Howell, Glenda Panke, Mark Bimm, Harold Yourth, Irene Churchill, Debbie Thom, Donna L Hoffman, Walter Hobden, Doug Holly and those in long term care facilities and senior residences. In this moment of silence we name out loud or in the quiet of our hearts those who need your healing touch. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You abide with your people. Sustain any in this community undergoing life transitions: marriage, divorce, childbirth, adoption, moving, graduation, employment change, or a death in the family. We pray for those preparing for baptism. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You bring life from death. We remember our loved ones who have died, confident that they have new life in you. May we trust that nothing can separate us from your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Accompany us on our journey, God of grace, and receive the prayers of our hearts, through Jesus Christ, our Savior.  
**Amen.**

### **BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord's face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✝ give you peace.

**Amen.**

### **DISMISSAL (ELW p. 146)**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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