**Third Sunday in Lent, Year B March 7, 2021**

**Introduction**

*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.*

**Prayer of the Day**

Eternal Lord, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your Word and obey it, so that we become instruments of your redeeming love; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Holy God, through your Son you have called us to live faithfully and act courageously. Keep us steadfast in your covenant of grace, and teach us the wisdom that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Psalm: Psalm 19** The heavens declare the glory of God,and the firmament shows his handiwork.

**One day tells its tale to another, and one night imparts knowledge to another.**

Although they have no words or language, and their voices are not heard,

**their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world.**

In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun;

it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber; it rejoices like a champion to run its course.

**It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens and runs about to the end of  it again;**

**nothing is hidden from its burning heat.**

The law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul;

the testimony of the Lord is sure and gives wisdom to the innocent.

**The statutes of the Lord are just and rejoice the heart;**

**the commandment of the Lord is clear and gives light to the eyes.**

The fear of the Lord is clean and endures forever;

the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

**More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,**

**sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.**

By them also is your servant enlightened, and in keeping them there is great reward.

**Who can tell how often they offend? Cleanse me from my secret faults.**

Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not get dominion over me;

then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent of a great offense.

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,**

**O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.**

Heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty. Open our eyes to see your gracious hand in all your works, that rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness, for the sake of him through whom all things were made, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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**First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17**

*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.*

1God spoke all these words:
  2I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3you shall have no other gods before me.
  4You 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. 5You 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, 6but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.
  7You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.
  8Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10But 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. 11For 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.
  12Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.
  13You shall not murder.
  14You shall not commit adultery.
  15You shall not steal.
  16You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
  17You 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.

**Background**

This is the seminal covenant for the people of Israel, the “Ten Commandments,” or “Decalogue” *(literally ten words: deca logos).* They consist of prohibitions and admonitions addressed to the individual, with no penalties and few details spelled out. Nine of these appear elsewhere in the Torah. A second telling is recorded in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. The severity of these words is such that when they occur elsewhere, the penalty for violation of most of them is death. These may have served as a creed as it did later in Judaism and in Christianity. The words were said to be inscribed by God (Exodus 31:18, 32:16), and placed in the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:16, 22; Deut. 10:1-5)

**Verse by Verse**

**1God** *(Heb. Elohim)* **spoke all these words:
2I am** *(the name of God revealed to Moses at the burning bush Ex. 3:14)* **the Lord** *( YHWH)***your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3you shall have no other gods** *(Heb. Elohim)* **before** *(Heb. al – before, over alongside)* **me.** *This sets out the basis for the covenant – the relationship between YHWH and Israel. It sets for the “because – therefore” of the relationship. Because YHWH has done this, therefore Israel will respond in this way.*

**4You shall not make for yourself an idol,** *(carved or graven image)* **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. 5You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous** *(Heb. qanna – only of God; 6 OT occurances, all in Exodus and Deuteronomy)* **God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject** *(Heb. lesoneyay – hate)* **me, 6but showing steadfast love** *(Heb. chesed – mercy)* **to the thousandth generation** *(Heb. laa-apim – thousands)* **of those who love me and keep my commandments.** *The cherubim in the adornment of the Tabernacle were creatures not of this world.)*

 **7You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit** *(clear the guilt)* **anyone who misuses his name.** *As in an oath. The name holds the honor and reputation of the person*

 **8Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy** *(Heb. qadash – holy, consecrated, set apart)***. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work** *(agree with an original motive to avoid danger)* **—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien** *(stranger, sojourner)* **resident in your towns. 11For 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.** *By observing the Sabbath, one does what God does.*

 **12Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.** *This is a positive framing. In 21:15 Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death. (!)*

 **13You shall not murder.** *Murder is considered to be pre-meditated; “murder one”; as opposed to accidental.*

 **14You shall not commit adultery.** *Men could be polygamous, so this would only apply to a woman having intercourse with a man other than her husband.*

 **15You shall not steal.** *Could refer to kidnapping as well as taking another’s possessions.*

 **16You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.** *A witness not only testified, but could also bring charges. In Jesus’ trial i.e. Matt. 26:59-61*Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.' *For a capital crime two witnesses had to agree on every point.*

 **17You shall not covet your neighbor’s house;** *Covet – to want to the point of theft*

**you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.**

**Theology: These words are not an “if-then” agreement, but a “because-therefore” – in which God is the initiator. Because of what the Lord has done for us, “we ought to fear love and trust God above all things.”**

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**Gospel: John 2:13-22**

*Jesus attacks the commercialization of religion by driving merchants out of the temple. When challenged, he responds mysteriously, with the first prediction of his own death and resurrection. In the midst of a seemingly stable religious center, Jesus suggests that the center itself has changed.*

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

**Background**

Jesus has performed his first sign – changing water to wine at the wedding at Cana (in Galilee). Then he, his mother and brothers, and his disciples went to Capernaum “and they remain there a few days”.

In the synoptics (Matthew, Mark, Luke) this event takes place following the triumphal entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, where it becomes a reason for his arrest. Commentators think that placement is probably more historical. John places it here to introduce the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, and also the introduce the theme that Jesus’ body is the new Temple. This gospel was written some 30 years after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD (CE) by the Romans.

**Verse by Verse**

**13The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.***One always “went up” to Jerusalem and the psalms that were sung (120-133) on the last part of the journey are called Songs of Ascents. As many as 100,000 people might make this pilgrimage, certainly making crowd control job #1 for the Roman “peacekeeping” forces.*

**14In the temple he found people selling** **cattle, sheep, and doves,** *(animals “without spot or blemish” suitable for sacrifice)* **and the money changers seated at their tables.***Converting foreign currency into “Temple coin” which would not show the head or motto of a foreign ruler. (as in “render unto Caesar” Matt. 22, Mark 12, Luke 20) This would have taken place in the “Court of the Gentiles” – the outermost of the Temple precincts, not in the areas reserved for worship and sacrifice.*

**15Making a whip of cords, he drove** *(Gk. exebalen – drove out, ejected, banished),* **all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle.** *(Synoptic accounts do not mention the whip, nor the sheep and cattle)*

**He also poured out** *(Gk. execheen – poured out – same verb used in the Last Supper accounts for his blood)* **the coins of the money changers and overturned** *(Gk. anetrepsen – overthrew, destroyed [not the model for the “Bills Mafia”!!] only use in the gospels)* **their tables.**

**16He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”***(the verbs are in the imperative – commands.) Zechariah 14:21 And there shall no longer be traders (Heb. Kanenani – Canaanite – also synonym for merchant or trader) in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.* Clearly this trade in the Temple precincts was nothing new!

**17His disciples remembered** *(not clear if this remembering was as they witnessed this or after cf. 14:26 - But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Also v. 22 below)*

**that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume** *(Gk. kataphagetai – eat up, deviour)* **me.”***Psalm 69:9 -*  *It is zeal for your house that has consumed me; the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.*

**18The Jews** *(in John denoting Jews who did not believe in Jesus – obviously Jesus and his disciples were all Jews!)* **then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?”***cf. I Corinthians 1:22**- For Jews demand signs. Raymond Brown has called the first 12 chapters of John the “Book of Signs”. Jesus’ actions are not described as miracles, but as signs – as 2:11 – Jesus di this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*

**19Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

*In Matt 26:59-61this is one of the false accusations made against Jesus at his trial:*

*59Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, 60but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward 61and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"*

**20The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years,** *(not the Temple itself, but Herod the Great’s renovations and enlargements to the Temple rebuilt after the return from exile in Babylon)* **and will you raise it up** *(Gk. egero – waken, raise up)* **in three days?”**

**21But he was speaking of the temple of his body.**

**22After he was raised** *(Gk. egerthe – as above)* **from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.**

**Theology: “First things first” means putting God first in all things!**