

**First United Methodist Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Lectionary Study Guide**

For use the week of March 1-7, 2021

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2021

Opening Prayer

Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit that, as the Scriptures are read and discussed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today. Amen.

Exodus 20:1-17

^{20:1} 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.

Commentary

For many, the Ten Commandments provide a reliable shorthand definition for what it means to be a good or moral person. God did set these rules apart from the rest by speaking them to the people directly rather than through Moses. Some Christians may question the normative value of these laws that Jesus came “not to abolish, but to fulfill” (Matthew 5:17). The benchmark set by Jesus and the apostles for the church was much higher and deeper than these commands (see Matthew 5:21-48 and Colossians 3:5-17). Moreover, Paul explicitly placed Christians under the norm of the Spirit rather than the Torah. The results, in terms of guidelines and behavior, often overlap, but that is because one God stands behind both.

Reflection

How well do the Ten Commandments provide guidance for living today? What moral dilemmas do we face in this modern age that are too complex to be resolved by the direct application of these laws? If there are ethical issues that we have to decide without the direct guidance of scripture, how do we do this as faithful Christians?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

1:18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Commentary

Paul drew sharp contrasts between what is wise according to the world and what is wise according to God. There is no comparison between these perspectives, for God is vastly greater than the world. The Corinthians challenge was to leave behind the values and conventional wisdom of the dominant culture and to embrace God's values in their own choices and behaviors.

Reflection

What values from American culture do you also attribute to your understanding of being Christian?

John 2:13-22

2:13 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.

Commentary

John presents Jesus throughout his Gospel as the one who perfects the worship of God and brings His followers into pure worship. John places this episode at the outset of Jesus' ministry, thereby highlighting Jesus' efforts to raise the level of first-century Jewish worship (as in the purification rites in 2:1-11 and the worship of God in spirit rather than in a specific location in 4:19-26).

Reflection

In what way do you share Jesus' zeal for the sanctity of worship and the protection of worshippers?

Responsive Reading

Psalm 19

^{19:1} The heavens are telling the glory of God;
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² **Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.**

³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;

⁴ **yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.**

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶ **Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hid from its heat.**

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
**the decrees of the LORD are sure,
making wise the simple;**

⁸ the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is clear,

- enlightening the eyes;**
9 the fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;
**the ordinances of the LORD are true
and righteous altogether.**
- 10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
**sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.**
- 11 Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
- 12 **But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.**
- 13 Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
**Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.**
- 14 **Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.**

Closing Prayer

**Grant, O Lord, that what we have said with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and that what we believe in our hearts we may practice in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**