

Lent 3—Year B  
Exodus 20:1-17  
Psalm 19  
I Corinthians 1:18-25  
John 2:13-22

We have **two passages** bracketing our lessons this morning. The **giving of the ten commandments in Exodus and Jesus having a “temple tantrum,”** as one commentator called it. And somehow, I think these are **connected**.

In the **first two commandments**, we hear God say this: **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in any way, shape, or from. 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, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.”**

God invested a lot in **delivering God’s people from slavery in Egypt**, and God is **drawing some boundaries to this relationship with God’s people**: **“You don’t have any other gods before me. Period. And if that’s abstract, let me spell it out for you, no idols, no idols. Don’t make them; don’t bow down to them; don’t worship them. If you do, there will be ripple effects and consequences that will impact those three and four generations down the line.”**

*Don’t we know it.* Think of any **intractable problem** that we are facing now. **Slavery and the systems of racism that followed with its twin evil of white supremacy. Poverty. Hunger. Climate change.**

Think about the **idols** that attend to each one of these problems—the **idol of superiority** and a **transactional notion of human beings as property** that can be **bought and sold—transactional notions** that *still exist in our time*, though in much more **covert** and **hidden** ways, a **cheap labor force** supplied through **mass incarceration** being one example.

There’s the **idol of greed** and **unequal income distribution** that **cannot find the will to tackle generational poverty**.

There’s the **idol of a zero-sum and scarcity mindset** that **cannot see we have enough food to feed everyone**.

And there’s the **idol of the earth being disposable and made for human consumption**.

Think about how **children are born into these circumstances**, how they are **shaped** by them, and **how often their own children will be caught in the same circumstances**. Think on these things, and **what God says in the second commandment just seems true—the children are punished for the iniquity of the parents for generations**.

There will be **two more commandments** that deal with **how we honor our relationship with God**, and **six commandments** that deal with **how we honor our relationship with our neighbor**, respecting **their dignity** and the **integrity of their person** as one **made in the image of God**.

Jesus lived and breathed these ten commandments and when asked in Matthew which is the *greatest* commandment of all, he will refuse to bite, condensing it all down to this: “‘You shall *love* the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall *love* your neighbor as yourself.’ in these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

One can only imagine that this was **deep in Jesus’ heart** and **on his mind** as he went up to Jerusalem for Passover and entered the temple, and what he found there disturbed him greatly—people selling cattle and sheep and doves, money changers seated at their tables.

While we think of Jesus as losing his cool in this story and turning over the tables in a fit of rage—i.e. his “*temple tantrum*”—this was anything but; this was a **calculated, considered action** on Jesus’ part. He *takes the time* to make a whip of cords that he *then* uses to drive out all those people selling, as well as the sheep and the cattle. *Then* he sets about pouring out the coins of the money changers and turning over all their tables. He *then* turns to those who were selling the doves and says, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” Make no mistake, there’s heat to what he’s doing and what he’s saying, but it’s *not* the fly-off-the-handle kind of heat; it’s righteous indignation that has been brewing because the whole system is *bankrupt*.

All this emphasis on *the temple*, and having to pay a *temple tax*, and all the *transactions* that have to take place to offer your sacrifice, to offer your worship—for Jesus, this *isn’t* what God is about. Nothing gets under Jesus’ skin like making our relationship with God *transactional*—he’s having none of it.

Jesus was taking down the *whole* system. *Those in power*—in John’s gospel, these are called “*the Jews*”—*they* ask him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of *the temple of his body*.

Again, Jesus is taking down the *whole* system. It *not* about the temple, it’s *not* about sacrificing animals, it’s *not* about who can afford to purchase the animal or pay the temple tax, it’s *not* about *transactions* of any sort—*it’s about his body, it’s about your body and my body, it’s about the mystical body of Christ*. It’s about *relationships* that *knit us together*, neighbor to neighbor, beloved to beloved, human to human, human to creation, beloved human to God. *God can’t be bought, or sold, only loved*.

*We probably know this at some level*. We probably *don’t* treat God as an economic *transaction*, but it’s easier than we think to slip into *transactional* thinking and turn our relationship with God into a *marketplace*. Any time we slide into what we need to do to *earn* God’s love or *prove* our worth, any time we think ourselves just *a little bit better* than the next guy, or *a little worse*, any time we *measure the value* of our life by our *productivity*, or *our net worth*, we have moved *from* the *relational* realm of life in God to the *transactional* realm with God as a *taskmaster*, and that puts us right back into the *constrictions* of Egypt—the very place from which God sought to deliver us.

*God doesn’t want us to buy and sell God, or ourselves, or our neighbor; God wants only to love and be loved, and for us to extend that same magnitude of love to our neighbor and to ourselves.*

It's interesting, in the second commandment where God says that the children will be *punished for the iniquity of the parents to the third and fourth generation, God goes on to say something else*. God also vows to "*show steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*" The *iniquity of the parents ripples out three and four generations*, but the *power of love ripples out a thousand generations*. I had never noticed that before. We focus on all that's wrong and intractable and pervasive, *but the power of love is so much more powerful than all of that!* The *power of love here and now can shift things for a thousand generations!* Think about that.

Jesus is focusing us like a laser beam today, putting before us in good Moses' fashion a choice—a choice *between a transactional approach to life in God and life in general AND a relational life IN God and WITH one another*. It's truly the choice *between life and death, between blessing and curses*, and in turning over the tables and driving out the animals and drawing attention to all that had gone wrong with the temple, he's *calling us back to where God decided to pitch the tent of divinity, calling us back to where God Godself decided to take up residence, not in a building but in a body*, Jesus' body, your body, my body—we're *all the holy of holies, if only we would bow and bend our knee before the majesty gazing back at us when we look in another's eyes*.

If we could truly see one another and this whole creation with the majesty these possess, then *all the idols that keep us in Egypt would pale by comparison*, and we would find the will to tackle the intractable problems that continue to enslave us and our children and our children's children.

*It's no small thing that Jesus does this day. He doesn't just upend the tables of the money changers, but he upends the whole system that diminishes the dignity of everyone who touches it. Today, let him upend the tables in your heart that think God's love can ever be bought or sold, and let him reorient you to know that you are precious beyond measure. Then, let him fill you with courage to upend the tables that would treat anyone beloved by God and precious in God's sight as goods to be quantified and traded, expendable and disposable.*

*And in all that upending, know that Jesus is making room. Into that space, let his love flow; let his love fill you full to overflowing, let that love weave you into the mystical body of Christ in whom all things hold together and know that, when it's all said and done, that love will still be reverberating a thousand generations from now. Amen.*

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