



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
 Wilton, WI  
 Third Sunday in Lent  
 March 7, 2021  
**Inviting People to  
 Journey with Christ's Family  
 in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

*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.*

### Bless Now, O God, the Journey



1 Bless now, O God, the jour - ney that all your peo - ple make,  
 2 Bless so - journ - ers and pil - grims who share this wind - ing way;  
 3 Di - vine e - ter - nal lov - er, you meet us on the road.



the path through noise and si - lence, the way of give and take.  
 your hope burns through the ter - rors, your love sus - tains the day.  
 We wait for lands of prom - ise where milk and hon - ey flow,



The trail is found in des - ert and winds the moun - tain round,  
 We yearn for ho - ly free - dom while of - ten we are bound;  
 but wait - ing not for plac - es, you meet us all a - round.



then leads be - side still wa - ters, the road where faith is found.  
 to - geth - er we are seek - ing the road where faith is found.  
 Our cov - e - nant is writ - ten on roads, as faith is found.

## 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.

## WORD

### FIRST READING

*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.*

### Exodus 20:1-17

<sup>1</sup>God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup>I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;

<sup>3</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>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,

<sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.

<sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work.

<sup>10</sup>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.

<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup>You shall not murder.

<sup>14</sup>You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup>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.

## Psalm 19

- <sup>1</sup>The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky proclaims its maker's handiwork.
- <sup>2</sup>One day tells its tale to another,  
and one night imparts knowledge to another.
- <sup>3</sup>Although they have no words or language,  
and their voices are not heard,  
<sup>4</sup>their sound has gone out into all lands, and their message to the ends of the world,  
where God has pitched a tent for the sun.
- <sup>5</sup>It comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;  
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.
- <sup>6</sup>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.
- <sup>7</sup>The teaching of the LORD is perfect and revives the soul;  
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives wisdom to the simple.
- <sup>8</sup>The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the heart;  
the commandment of the LORD is clear and gives light to the eyes.
- <sup>9</sup>The fear of the LORD is clean and endures forever;  
the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
- <sup>10</sup>More to be desired are they than gold, more than much fine gold,  
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the comb.
- <sup>11</sup>By them also is your servant enlightened,  
and in keeping them there is great reward.
- <sup>12</sup>Who can detect one's own offenses?  
Cleanse me from my secret faults.
- <sup>13</sup>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.
- <sup>14</sup>Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight,  
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

### SECOND READING

*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.*

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." <sup>20</sup>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? <sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup>but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup>but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup>For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

## HOLY GOSPEL

*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.*

### 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.

## SERMON

Today, we continue walking with Jesus during the 40-days of Lent. Our Lenten journey is a time of repentance, new or renewed spiritual practices, and focusing on God as we prepare for Easter. In similar, although different ways, we are like the Jewish people in our pericope today who are on a pilgrimage before the Passover. Their focus is on purification, spiritual practices, and being present with God.

Our gospel passage this week is taken from the book of John. While parallel passages are found in Matthew, Mark and Luke, they appear in a different place in Jesus' ministry than our reading today. In the gospel of John, the passage is near the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after Jesus turns water into wine. In the Synoptic gospels, it is near the end of Jesus' ministry, before Jesus' passion.

Last week, we heard Jesus foreshadowing what was going to happen to him. Three times, he told his disciples about his suffering, death, and resurrection. Today, we read of Jesus in Jerusalem at the temple, as we recognize the importance of Jesus' Jewish ancestry, his teaching--in word, and in deed-- and his role as the Son of God.

Jerusalem is the Holy City. Within the Holy City, the temple is the most holy place, because it is God's house. It is the place in ancient times, where God was thought to live, to be present, to dwell. Prior to the Babylonian destruction of the first temple (the temple built by King Solomon), the Ark of the Covenant which held the Ten Commandments, was kept in the most sacred place in the temple, the Holy of Holies. Therefore, we recognize the importance of the temple to the Jewish people, and their pilgrimage to Jerusalem as a holy and sacred journey to be with God.

Jesus has arrived in Jerusalem, yet many in the city will not recognize him as the Son of God, nor will they recognize that they are receiving a "visitation from God!" They will not acknowledge Jesus' authority, his power, or his right to challenge the activities going on in the temple. They will not recognize God's presence, through Jesus' presence among them.

The time of the Passover is near. Passover is a sacred festival for the Jewish people. It is a reminder of God's liberation of their ancestors from slavery and their exodus from Egypt. Many Jewish people will come to Jerusalem and to the temple prior to Passover to seek purification. Their pilgrimage is a reminder of what their ancestors lives, and their lives could have been/would have been without God's intervention, God's covenant with them, God's forgiveness and God's saving grace.

When Jesus arrives at the temple, instead of seeing the reverence, prayer, and teaching from the Torah that he expects in this sacred place, he is overwhelmed by sellers and buyers. He sees moneychangers and

others focusing on wealth and monetary gain, not their own and others' purification and spiritual practices! He tells those selling doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (vs. 2:16) He acts with anger and rage, and the disciples recall these words of the Psalmist, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Psalm 69:9).

There are some persons who consider Jesus' actions in the temple that day as promoting violence. Perhaps these are persons who also take passages from the Bible out of context to support their own violent and demeaning actions against other human beings. Perhaps they use(d) the Bible to support slavery, the KKK, human trafficking, white supremacy, hatred against persons of color, and other examples of racism, discrimination, and oppression. But, using this pericope in this way is inappropriate! Jesus' is not condoning the use of violence! It would be out of character for Jesus to have used his whip to hit anyone--human or animal. Jesus' actions are not encouraging people to take up arms or participate in an insurrection! Rather, Jesus' actions are encouraging respect for God, and respect for the temple, because the temple is God's house. Even though the money changing and selling of animals are related to the temple's activities, the way in which these activities are being carried out is displeasing to Jesus. He is not using violence to achieve his goals, but rather, assertive (rather than aggressive) nonviolent means to let people know that their activities are falling short of God's desires.

Jesus' statement, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19) is not referring to the actual temple in Jerusalem, but to Jesus' body as a temple. Jesus is once again foreshadowing his death and his resurrection. The Jewish people do not understand, and they do not recognize Jesus's authority as the Son of God. His disciples do not understand at this time either, but they do later, after his resurrection.

We have learned a great deal about what it means to physically be away from a church building. In two weeks, it will be a full-year since we have had inside, in-person Sunday worship services at St. Paul's. We have learned during this time of the Coronavirus pandemic, that being church is not about physically being inside the church building. While we respect that the church building is God's house, and we try to use it for activities that show respect for God, we do not say as they did in ancient times that God lives in the church. We show respect for God, by following God's commandments, and especially by loving God and our neighbors.

We, as Lutherans, believe that God is present with us in the sanctuary at St. Paul's, but also present with us in our homes, in our cars at the drive-in services, in the care centers where some of our members live, and other places. We acknowledge God's presence in, with and under the bread and wine. We believe that God lives in us through our baptism and the Holy Spirit working within us. We acknowledge God's presence with us wherever we may be. And when we speak of God's presence, we don't point in one direction, to one specific place, in order to identify where God is located. Rather, we point in any number of directions! We are church, and we continue to be a church, even when our worship is not in the church sanctuary. We are church, not because of any building, but because of God.

Alicia D. Myers states,

For John, when people focus too much on a physical location, they miss out on God's glory standing right in front of them. Thus, when Jerusalem leaders worry about the fate of the temple in 11:45-50, John again recenters our gaze. The Romans will destroy a physical building [the temple] in 70 CE, but it was their destruction of Jesus' body, God's true sanctuary, that was both tragic and the means of God's greatest revelation (11:51-52; see also 3:14-18; 19:34-37) *Working Preacher*, 2021.

What occurs in us and through us as followers of Jesus, is of far greater import than any brick and mortar building! While we seek to keep God's house a holy and sacred place, what is inside us is far more important than any building. For our bodies are to be temples, holy and acceptable to God. And, the focus of our worship, wherever that occurs, is to be on God and God's glory. That is the true joy that comes to us in hearing this pericope, and in our journey with Jesus: knowing God and God's glory. Thanks be to God. Amen

## **PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Relying on the promises of God, we pray boldly for the church, the world, and all in need.

There is no God before you. Purify the faith of your church, that your people place their trust in nothing beside you. Your name is holy. Guide your church, that in every situation your people's words and actions honor your name.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

The heavens declare your glory. Renew your creation. Provide leaders in the struggle for clean air and water; protect creatures and crops that rely on healthy ecosystems; give all people the willingness to repent when our way of life pollutes the earth and skies.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Your foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. Fill leaders with the foolishness of your peace and mercy. Your law defends the vulnerable. Work through legislators, judicial systems, and systems of law enforcement to protect the wellbeing and freedom of all.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

Your weakness is stronger than human strength. Protect those who are vulnerable and give courage to all who are suffering especially Katie, Judy, Darlene, Paul, Pam, Alrita, Frank, Jeff, Tessa, Lisa, Bud, Jim, those with the Coronavirus, and those we name aloud and in our hearts. Defend victims of crime and bring redemption to those who have harmed others. Give sabbath rest to all who labor.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

You call us to proclaim Christ crucified. Give clarity to this congregation and our leaders, so that we might follow Christ beyond our own habits and comfort. Clear out anything in our common life that would obscure the gospel or that serves our own interests.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

The cross of Christ is your power for all who are being saved. Thank you for all the martyrs whose witness reveals the power of the cross. Give us the same trust in life and in death.

Hear us, O God.

**Your mercy is great.**

We entrust ourselves and all our prayers to you, O faithful God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

## **LORD'S PRAYER**

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen

## Eternal Lord of Love, Behold Your Church



1 E - ter - nal Lord of love, be - hold your church  
2 So dai - ly dy - ing to the way of self,  
3 If dead in you, so in you we a - rise,



walk - ing once more the pil - grim way of Lent,  
so dai - ly liv - ing in your way of love,  
you the first - born of all the faith - ful dead;



led by your cloud by day, by night your fire,  
we walk the road, Lord Je - sus, that you trod,  
and as through ston - y ground the green shoots break,



moved by your love and toward your pres - ence bent:  
know - ing our - selves bap - tized in - to your death:  
glo - rious in spring - time dress of leaf and flow'r,



far off yet here— the goal of all de - sire.  
so we are dead and live with you in God.  
so in - to life and glo - ry shall we wake.

Text: Thomas H. Cain, 1931–2003

Music: OLD 124TH, *Trente quatre psaumes de David*, Geneva, 1551

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March 3

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The World Day of Prayer for 2021, is this Friday (March 5). It is held "annually on the 1st Friday of March. Each year, people of all faiths join in prayer to further peace and understanding of one another" (*La Crosse Tribune*, Saturday, February 27, 2021, p. A6).

As we read about people in other parts of the world, including those in Colombia and India in our Lenten Study, we are reminded of the great need for prayer. In the newspaper this week, perhaps you read about the protests in Myanmar, Israeli-Iranian conflicts, and the kidnapping (and thankfully, the return) of young schoolgirls in Nigeria. Perhaps you read about as many as 16 million people in Yemen going hungry this year, political unrest in Hong Kong, and 15 migrants from Africa drowning while enroute to a new and better life in Europe (*La Crosse Tribune*, Monday, March 1, 2021, p. A4).

Perhaps you read about migrants who were deported from the U.S. without their children, or the need for Coronavirus vaccines here and abroad. There are many prayer petitions that we can make, for we know these examples are only some of the many needs evident throughout the world.

On Friday evening, the La Crosse Area Church Women United is hosting a virtual World Day of Prayer service. It will be held online via Zoom from 6-7 p.m. The featured program has been written by the women of Vanuatu (an island close to New Zealand). The service includes a short video, music from Vanuatu, prayer service and a short reflection.

Pre-registration is required, so that you can receive a Zoom entrance code, or a telephone number for the audio version. To pre-register, email Sue Staples at [stap@centurytel.net](mailto:stap@centurytel.net) If you need assistance in pre-registering, please contact Nalani at the church office.

Let us join together in prayer with persons of diverse faith traditions on the World Day of Prayer.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy