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Exodus 20:1-17; John 2:13-22

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***Exodus 20:1-17***

***20Then God 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.***

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

***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.***

I went to a memorial service yesterday, at Most Holy Redeemer Catholic church in San Francisco. As the procession entered the chapel, they stopped first at the baptismal font, reminding us that from the beginning, our friend belonged to God. In our baptism we enact an outward sign of the claim that God has already had on us. Our friend’s death was the completion of his baptism.

In his baptism, as in ours, someone probably called him a Child of the Covenant. The same sacred covenant toward which this Lenten season is leading us.

In our study of Biblical Covenants over the last few weeks, we have looked at God’s covenant with Noah and creation and God’s covenant with Abraham – the covenant that goes back so far as to connect us with the three Abrahamic religions of the world. Today Tamra read scripture from Exodus that gives us the 10 Commandments – a part of the Mosaic or Sinai Covenant.

Each covenant that we have looked at so far is slightly different than the one before. The progression has been one of increasing intimacy between God and God’s people. The covenant with Noah was a promise for humanity and all of the creatures of the earth. The covenant with Abraham was a promise of a multitude of descendants for Abraham – the creation through Abraham of a specific community. Jumping ahead to Exodus 20 for today, a lot of ground has been covered since Noah and Abraham. God has continued to be with the descendants of Abraham through all of their circumstances. By Exodus 20, the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for some time. In Exodus 14, God delivered the Israelites from Pharaoh by parting the Red Sea so that they could cross to the other side to safety, away from the pursuing Egyptian army. In Exodus 16 God took care of them by sending manna from heaven, and in Exodus 17 by producing water from a rock.

Now in Exodus 20, Moses has led the Israelites to the valley of Mt. Sinai, where God and Moses have been in constant conversation. By the time Moses goes up the mountain and receives the commandments – and this is the biggest difference between the covenants thus far – the Israelites have witnessed and have benefitted from the amazing care that God has had for them throughout their history. Commentator Joy J. Moore reminds us that the covenant given to Moses to deliver to the Israelites is the first time God’s covenant has had conditions. She says it’s as if God is saying, “Now I’ve shown you, so I ask you to do this.”1

And they are quite the conditions. The commandments aren’t just these 10 listed in scripture. The entire law given to Moses consists of the biblical books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The entire first five books of our Old Testament make up the Book of the Covenant, or the Book of the Law (the Torah) that was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai.2 In those five books are written 613 laws for Jews to live by, which include the Ten Commandments.

Along with the increasingly particular covenants we have been during Lent thus far, we have also read a paired gospel reading each week which serves to bring the ancient events closer to the events of Jesus’ lifetime, both of which are ancient to you and me.

After Jesus’ baptism, and time in the wilderness, Jesus began to teach his disciples what he himself was understanding about what it meant for him to be the Messiah, and for his followers to be disciples. From promises of protection in the wilderness relying on God alone, to understanding what it means that Jesus will have to be persecuted, suffer, and die, the gospel lessons are also bringing us closer and closer to the reality of God with us and for us. First Jesus was baptized and protected in the wilderness – maybe we as readers were witnesses of that. Then last week Jesus began to teach his disciples – maybe then we went from just witnesses to actual participants as we too are disciples. In today’s paired gospel reading, we have jumped to relatively straight forward, get-the-job-done gospel of Mark, to the more metaphorical and mysterious gospel of John. Today, in an even more visceral description of his divinity and why it matters to everyone, Jesus says that his actual body will be the temple for us, will function for us just like the destroyed temple would have. Unlike the gospel lessons of the past two weeks, we aren’t just witnesses, we aren’t just listeners, we are being offered Jesus’ actual body. Jesus as the Temple itself.

To understand the Gospel of John, we have to suspend time. The *scene as written* takes place in the Temple that took 46 years to construct during the time before it’s destruction. But the *writing of* that scene takes place *after* that same Temple had already been destroyed by the Roman Empire. What Jesus was *teaching* in the scene served as a *consolation* to the audience of his contemporaries – two different audiences with the same writing. Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary writes, “In the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple, the Gospel of John is providing solace to its community by reminding them that Jesus is the new Temple, the Son of God (as written in John 1:34), the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (as written in John 1:29).1 The focus for the Gospel of John has always been that Jesus in the flesh is God with us. Skinner continues, “John’s theological purpose is that the word became flesh, this text is the first time we see that God is now dwelling in Jesus.”1

Lent is a six-week mini-series that answers the question, “How is it that God has come to dwell within each of our hearts?”

Part of the answer is that God *always* meant to love us. God has been moving steadily closer for all of history. God didn’t send Jesus just out of the blue, right here into the midst of God’s people. Jesus is in our hearts because God has been putting God’s self in our lives, our circumstances, and our minds all along. Like that pet that just can’t get close enough, God finally entered our hearts and dwelled within us. But God doesn’t want pets, God doesn’t want to cuddle. God stands strong in these hearts of ours and says I’m yours, you are mine. I am with you. I am in you.

*I am.*

Amen.

1<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/951-third-sunday-in-lent-mar-3-2024>

2Abrahamic religions believe in the Mosaic covenant (named after Moses), also known as the Sinaitic covenant (after the biblical Mount Sinai), which refers to a covenant between the Israelite tribes and their God, including their proselytes, not limited to the ten commandments, nor the event when they were given, but including the entirety of laws that their legendary patriarch Moses delivered from God in the five books of Torah.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic_covenant>