

Promised Presence - Crushing Rules.”

3 Lent B March 7, 2021 Rev. Dr. David Gardner Tweed

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 and 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 the divine 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.

Gospel: John 2:13-22

¹³The Passover of the Jewish people 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 Judeans 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 Judeans then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But Jesus 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.

Churches and people of faith often love the structure of rules – guides for how to think, what to do, what not to do, how to behave, etc. It makes it so much easier to simply follow the rules and think that if we do so we are pleasing to God and being faithful. While that may be true there is no place in which to experience or know love, life and passion in those rules. True obedience doesn't come because I'm forced or expected to do something...it rises up out of a relationship shaped and filled with real love. I 'do' because I want to do is an expression of faith. I act because I want to be a person who acts this way. I believe because the Promised Presence of God's Spirit gives me the gift to do so. When other things get in the way of that love being expressed and lived they become a problem. Jesus forcibly removed the miserly merchants because they were no longer assisting the people in a worship life but making their life off of their worship. We need to stop living under the CRUSH of the RULES as they burden and press in on our conscience and souls but rather CRUSH the RULES that stand in the way of that loving Presence of God being lived out.

Some principles for Life (Living in Faith Everyday)

- A) *Go through the course of a day and monitor your thinking and behaviors while asking the question: what do I believe or do because I just automatically think/feel that I SHOULD be doing this or that? Is that SHOULD really helpful? Why? What is the goal of that SHOULD that lives within you? Where did it come from? Does it need updating?*
- B) *The difference between the 10 Commandments (the LAW) and the Gospel (GRACE) is their motivation. Both are gifts from God: the LAW brings about good order/structure while GRACE brings about deeper relationship/connection with God and the desire to bring everyone into that relationship.... with all of its understandings and actions. Do you recall making the transition from having to obey the rules of life and finding you desire the structure/order and you felt like you began to understand the foundation of love that is underneath good rules? How did you instill in your children/family/employees/team a sense of “wanting” to do that which is the ‘right thing’?*
- C) *Jesus lives/is the vision of how life can be...how the world can be....of what God desires us to experience. His anger/actions are motivated by the love of what*

God desires and the contrast of what the merchants had done. What do you struggle with that shows you the contrast of what God truly may desire and how the world has chosen to be? How is 'what God desires' being tested/confirmed/examined to ensure it is accurate/sound/correct and not just your interpretation/desires? What are you doing about it? Why aren't you doing something? Jesus then chose to give his life leaning into the Promises that God would do something. How far are you willing to give of yourself? What would make even a little change in your approach possible? Jesus' resurrection proves it makes a difference. Do you believe that is true for you too?

Upcoming:

3.14 Promised Presence: Persevering & Enduring

3.21 Promised Presence: Hope Seeds that Break Hearts

3.28 Promised Presence: From Waving Palm Branches to Hanging on a Tree Branch