**St. David’s Episcopal Church**

Beanblossom, Indiana

**The Third Sunday in Lent, March 3, 2024**

Sermon by the Rev. Kate Wilson

Exodus 20:1-17 **Psalm 19** 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 John 2:13-22

 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
heart be acceptable in your sight, \*
O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.

✠

You have heard preachers open with this verse before. Now you know its source, Psalm 19. It is commonly used to ask God’s acceptance of words offered humbly before so great a God. For newer, nervous preachers, it is very comforting to acknowledge God’s strength and maybe borrowing just a bit of it, for about ten minutes.

God the creator has a starring role in all four readings today. In the Psalm 19, he has created the marvels of nature, the laws and commandments that can not only keep us from punishment in the here and now but in the yet to come, and can give us the serenity of resting peacefully in the warmth of God. God forgives sins, even those done with absolute clarity that they ARE sins—those presumptuous sins—and we do them anyway. On top of that, God can protect us from sinfulness and be our strengths. That is quite an extensive job description for the most extensive and expansive Essence.

The psalm mentions laws, and Exodus gets into some depth on the commandments. I noticed something interesting about the content of this passage. When I worked in educational publishing and created test questions, I was careful **not** to make the right answer the longest choice: that was a giveaway. Apparently, God doesn’t have that rule in commandment writing: take another look at the passage on page 4.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

Each of these sins gets just one sentence. These are serious sins! Murder, adultery, theft, and bearing false witness. I was shocked to realize no explanation, no elaboration is given. Are you surprised?

One commandment was worth two whole lines on the page. Which is that? YES, honoring your father and your mother. And it gets worse – you don’t honor them because they deserve it; you honor them to extend your life in the promised land. Doesn’t THAT explain a few things!! And then they have the nerve to go into therapy and blame you for everything, even though they left home at 18 and have lived for more than 18 years on their own. Go figure.

Are you ahead of me? The three-liner commandment condemns coveting a neighbor’s house or anything else. **Covet** means to desire wrongfully, inordinately, or without due regard for the rights of others. You don’t take it, plot against your neighbor, or try to swindle your neighbor out of it. In our culture, simply coveting doesn’t seem so serious. It can lead to serious things, and those things are already condemned – in the short commandments. It’s still true, though, that even your neighbor gets more attention than your mother and father and all those criminal acts.

And finally, look at the lines devoted to God: **16 lines**. I am the Lord your God: have no other gods before me. Don’t make any kind of idol; don’t worship any kind of idol; don’t even think of using my name dishonorably, why? Because I am the Lord your God. And don’t work on the Sabbath, but rest. Not just because even God rested, but also because the Sabbath is consecrated for use in your honoring God.

It is easy to be cynical about God’s selfishness, as if God is someone who works in a local store. But let’s not. Let’s get into the spirit of the Scripture, that there is nothing greater, more creative, more loving, more powerful than the God who made all things for our benefit and use. It seems right to give God honor and praise, as the writer of Exodus expects.

Now, if using God’s name in profanity is prohibited, how might God feel about using the sacred temple of Jerusalem for reasons other than for the worship of God? How might people who profiteer and cheat customers from all the lands from which Jews return to Jerusalem? That is exactly what the money changers did. For the sake of purity, only special temple coins were to be used inside the temple, not the profane coins of Rome or some Gentile land. Pilgrims brought the money they used at home, and had to convert it to temple coin. And they were cheated by the money changers in the process. Vendors set up stalls on the property of the temple and had their filthy animals, from birds to oxen, right there with them. They sold a lot of the birds, but dreamed of the day when a wealthy visitor wanted to atone for an especially sinful act or wanted to offer supplication for something they wanted God to grant for them. Selling an ox would feed the family for a month and buy new cloth for clothing for everyone.

I’m going to guess that God would be horrified to see such sacrilege. Yet it had gone on for as long as anyone could remember. When you have a market, the marketer will appear. These practices had gone on for so long, no one thought anything about it.

Until Jesus returned to Jerusalem, shortly before he would be captured, sentenced in a bogus trial, and crucified. He enters the Temple, to pray, to think, to connect with the Holy he served and honored. And he found – sacrilege.

Jesus reacted with rage at the blasphemy, at the desecration right in the middle of the Temple of Jerusalem, with crowds who have gathered from near and far. You probably remember what Jesus said in this scene in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke: “Jesus then spoke to the startled crowds: ‘It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.’"

But this is not Matthew or Luke. This is John, who points us always to the divinity of Jesus.

More than the startled crowd was present. His disciples were as startled as everyone else, and no doubt they were also confused. Who is this Jesus? What is going on.

Importantly, what John describes as “the Jews” were there. Who does he mean? Everyone there was a Jew. For John, “The Jews” means Jews with power, temple priests and scribes. “The Jews” demanded that Jesus give some reasonable explanation for this wreckage. Of course they did. Jesus just made a huge public scene, loud, messy, and disrupting business. It was probably even illegal. Who did Jesus think he was, pulling such a prank? Just before the sacred season of Passover when Jerusalem and the temple were packed with visitors. What if the Romans heard about this?

### Jesus’s answer?“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” **Ridiculous!** The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”

### And again, this is not Matthew or Luke. They move on right after Jesus cleanses the Temple. This is John. When Jesus told them to “destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. John continues: **“**But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.**”**

### John names the divinity of Jesus, who will be crucified, and will rise from the dead in glory. The glorified Jesus is Jesus in full divinity, full oneness with the Essence, the Holy, God. For the history of the Jewish people, God was beyond our understanding. God deserves our love and praise and adoration. In just a little while, says John, the Disciples and the rest of us will see Jesus the divine, in greater glory than in the Transfiguration. And we will be free.