

John 2:13-22
March 3, 2024

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

I think the lectionary folks have done the right thing here today in pairing the 10 commandments with the cleansing of the Temple.

Did you know that the pairing of the lessons is done intentionally? It is. At least between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel. Some times the New Testament reading isn't specifically tied to the Gospel. During certain times of the year, it just goes through parts of one Epistles at a time.

But anyway... Let's talk about today. If we line up the 10 Commandments with the cleansing of the Temple, we can see that the leaders of the Temple are not following the Commandments of God – and that's their job! They are to lead by example, but they don't and they are blinded to their own sin.

So, First Commandment – I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me.

The problem during Jesus' day is that God is no longer before the people, because they are being blocked by the tables of the money changers and the tables of those selling live stock.

Prior to Herod building the Temple, which still wasn't complete, all the animals were sold off site and most people from the country brought animals from their own flock to sacrifice. They were able to take their animals right up the front steps without any middle man. But with Herod, there became two middle men who were profiting from the worship of God, and Passover was a big money-making business.

First you have to pay to change your money and then you have to pay for the animal. It's like having to pay two tolls before you can even approach God. That is not okay.

God is your God, and there is nothing that can separate us from God. And so, Jesus comes in the flesh and walks among the people, and tears down everything that separates us from God.

With the cleansing of the Temple, we see how the love of money is the root of all evil. God loves people, not money. Money is a useful tool, but it is not the same as a human being.

By placing the merchants and commerce right at the entrance to the Temple, God was made distant, making God not our God but the God of the Temple who is charging for access.

Jesus, however, walks with the people and removes all obstacles that have been set up by the leaders of the Temple by over turning their money-making stalls.

Second commandment. You shall make no idols. The Temple itself had become an idol. Like the money used by the wheelers and dealers it was worshipped, as we hear from the disciples themselves as they ooo and awe over it. Isn't it amazing! No. God is amazing! And that building is not God. It is hard and cold and doesn't care about anyone.

Jesus, however, walks among the people, cares for us, and heals us. He is God's presence, not the Temple. And that is why when he is killed, the real temple, his body, is resurrected. God's true temple cannot be destroyed and it is through Christ that we worship and adore God.

Third Commandment. You shall not use God's name in vain, meaning you shall not speak wrongly about God, which the Temple leaders were doing. They were implying that you had to buy their goods with their money in order to approach God. And that is a lie. God does not demand payment.

So, Jesus walks among the people. They don't have to do anything to be in his presence. His arms are open wide to everyone. And that is the truth. God wants to be in a relationship with everyone just as we are. We don't need anything special to buy as admittance to God. You don't need a ticket. Instead, God is seeking us out and coming into our presence.

Forth Commandment. Keep the Sabbath holy. Rest and be in God's presence. Rely and trust in God. Unfortunately, the Temple leaders were implying with the tables set up that they were the ones to be trusted. Not God. Trust us and our way of doing things.

This should sound a bit familiar to the serpent in the Garden with Adam and Eve. Did they trust God or the serpent? The serpent.

Jesus, however, comes and walks among the people and throws the snake out. Trust God not the work of people.

Fifth Commandment. Honor your parents. We know from other stories that parents were not being treated well. People were giving their money to the Temple instead of taking care of their parents.

Jesus, however, comes and walks among the people and heals, cares for, and feeds the elderly. He does what their children and the Temple were called to do. The Temple was to care for those in need, but it stocked all the money away for the continuation of the building the Temple.

Sixth Commandment. Don't murder people. It is the Temple elite that will make sure Jesus is murdered on the cross.

But, Jesus comes and walks among the people anyway, generously giving out life – eternal life – to everyone.

Seventh Commandment. Do not commit adultery. It's important to remember that Biblically speaking adultery was tied to idolatry. When the Hebrew people worshipped other gods and idols, the prophets said they were committing adultery. They were sleeping with other gods.

Jesus, however, comes and walks among the people and is faithful. Although God is being cheated on, Jesus keeps God's side of the covenant.

Eighth Commandment. Do not steal. Through the use of the money lenders and the animal sellers, the Temple was stealing from the people. They could have brought their own sacrifice, but instead they were forced to pay for their denarii to be changed into shekels and then for an animal. And you know prices at the Temple weren't cheap. High demand and low stock.

Jesus, however, comes and walks among the people and gives us what we need for free. He is the last and ultimate sacrifice who brings all of creation salvation.

Ninth Commandment. Do not bear false witness against your neighbor. The Temple elite made sure to brand Jesus as unholy because he was challenging their way of doing business.

Jesus, however, comes and walks among the people and speaks only the truth. The Temple leaders had turned to sin and Jesus does not speak falsely about them.

Tenth Commandment. Do not covet your neighbor's stuff, animals, or people. They are not yours. But, as often happens, once you start accumulating wealth it's hard to stop. Greed makes it impossible to not want everyone else's stuff, including what belongs to God alone – God's glory, God's creation, God's people.

So, Jesus comes and walks among the people and gives everything away, including his very own being – his life and his body. He never covets their Temple building, wanting it for himself. When he does speak of the temple being destroyed, it is his own body he is talking about. The one that they will have hung on the cross so they can continue in their sin.

But, Jesus does not condemn them. Although they murder him and have broken every major commandment God has set before them, Jesus forgives them.

Those who have worshipped idols and have made gods out of creation, who have misused God's name, who have not trusted in God, who have not honored the elderly, who have murdered him, who have committed adultery with other gods, who have stolen from everyone including the poor, who have spoken wrongly about him, who have coveted all that their neighbors have, Jesus has forgiven.

Jesus forgives. With his arm's wide-open on the cross, he welcomes everyone back into the fold. Not only welcomes but invites.

After the resurrection many did repent, but others did not.

Regardless, Jesus does not seek any form of revenge. He never breaks the 10 Commandments. Instead, he only wants the best for us, abundant life for us, because God loves us. God loves us so much that God is willing to continue in the covenant God made with us even though we have broken our side of it.

God is faithful even when we are not. Our sins are forgiven, so that God can welcome us over and over again back into the fold. We need only repent and God is there. We need only move our eyes from the ways of this world in order to see God with us and for us, walking along the way with us as our eternal companion.

Like your shadow, he isn't going anywhere. We may not always notice him, but he is here and there with us, eternally. God never gives up on us. God never breaks the covenant.

Thanks be to God. Amen.