

John 2.13-22; Exodus 20.1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Cor.1.18-25.
Third Sunday of Lent: 8th March 2015.
8:00 & 10:00 am @ St. Andrew's Totteridge

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
always be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.*

I'm guessing that, by virtue of your presence here today, you accept that human beings benefit from a set of values, from acceptance of, and repeated exposure to, the ways of something or someone who is bigger, wiser, infinitely more powerful than we are. That we all need continual guidance, a moral and spiritual compass to help us find direction and bring us back on course.

Scripture can be seen as just that, as a continual attempt by God across the ages to provide just that. To explain that it is God that made the universe and everything in it; that we, as part of that Creation, need to keep a proper respect for our place in his Creation, important though God made that to be. The reading from Exodus is one of the first times God spells this out, offering a set of ten commandments by which the early believers in the one true God would find their way out of the spiritual wilderness of the world. A world previously inhabited by a multitude of sometimes bitter and vengeful gods that they'd made up for themselves.

And as we journey through this time of Lent, accompanying Christ in some way or other, as he fights for us through temptation, we look to God and his Holy Spirit to help us

with self-control or self-restraint, to help us relinquish all those things which are self-destructive in some way, that keep us from growing our relationship with God.

The marvellous Psalm 19 reminds us of how the universe, the galaxies, the stars and solar systems, even the days and nights of our world, all pour forth the glory of God and his handiwork without need of words or speech. It reminds us to look further at the nature of the worlds spiritual and temporal that we inhabit.

Think about it - if you could find something that would revive your soul, make you wise, that would fill you full of joy, that could open your eyes to true understanding, that would give you a pure strength to endure whatever came your way, wouldn't you do anything to possess those gifts? Yet here they are, in Psalm 19, on offer to you every day of your lives,

The Law of the Lord is perfect and revives the soul.
the **decrees** of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
the **precepts** of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the **commandment** of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
the **fear** of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the **ordinances** of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb (Psalm 19.7-10).

But God's law, being open to everyone, is also open to corruption. The people of Israel made an idol of the law of Moses itself and valued this above God's Spirit of love, mercy, forgiveness and truth that gave them the law in the first place. In following the letter of the law the High Priests of the Temple forgot the spirit in which it was intended, so that as long as laws were being observed, it didn't matter if a bunch of fraudsters and charlatans set up their stalls in God's house and ripped off his people.

But it mattered to Jesus, God's presence on earth. Today's gospel comes just before Jesus has performed his first miracle at Cana, an affirmation of the sacrament of marriage if ever there was one. This affirmation of something so right and beautiful and life-giving is quickly followed by this spectacular condemnation of something wrong, and ugly and life-draining. With a quickly-fashioned whip of cords Jesus drives the money-changers and the sacrifice-sellers from His Father's house.

And then, in Christ's inimitable fashion, he offers this amazing response to the request for a sign, an authority, by which he does what he has done. And straight away, though the people misunderstand what he means, his reply affirms his divine status – that if they destroy the temple of God that his own body represents, he will within the three days from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, raise it up for all of humanity.

The Temple that's taken forty-six years to build, like the law they have idolised rather than fulfilled, will be fulfilled by the new covenant Christ brings to God's people. It is believed that Christ died aged 33 in or around the year AD 39. In AD 70 the Romans destroyed the temple – in AD 2015, the body of Christ, his church, goes on.

But before that Resurrection can come about, we remember Christ's temptations in the wilderness. And we remember Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians as it reminds us of the message of the cross, about how it was only through facing up to all the horrors, persecutions and tortures of such an agonizing death that Christ was able to bring us the glory of the kingdom and the promise of eternal life.

And so to finish, those who feel that humanity can manage without need of divine guidance should beware. Those whose spiritual life is dependent on how they prosper in this world see only folly in the need for higher authority or religious belief; but those who find in belief salvation for their souls see something infinitely deeper...

'For 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 (1 Cor. 1.18).

Spoken in the name of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Amen

John 2.13-22

13 The 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 market-place!' 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.

Exodus 20.1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

2 I 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.

4 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. 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.

7 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.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labour 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.

12 Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

13 You shall not murder.

14 You shall not commit adultery.

15 You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

Psalms 19

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
³ There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding
canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them;
and nothing is hidden from its heat.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹ the fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring for ever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹ Moreover by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
¹² But who can detect their errors?

Clear me from hidden faults.
¹³ Keep back your servant also from the insolent;
do not let them have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my
heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

1 Corinthians 1.18-25

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

*The New Revised Standard Version (Anglicized Edition), copyright 1989, 1995 by the
Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in
the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.*