

Exodus 20:1-17

¹Then 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.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

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

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 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.

JESUS LEADS US OUT OF THE CHURCH

1. Rehash and summary of today: from church

This is week three of our worship series, *Walking with Jesus*, and just to rehash the points I've tried to make thus far: in week one I asserted that God's love is the very air that we breathe; it's something that we may not even notice or appreciate, but it is essential to our very life. Jesus began his walk in ministry with a very clear sense of God's love for him. We can't begin our walk with Jesus without that clear sense of God's love for us as well. In week two I said that the road that we walk is a road we share, that our ancestors prepared us for that road, and we in turn are called to prepare the next generation for that walk as well. The road originated with God, and it ends with God, and Jesus accompanies us, as he has accompanied those who came before, as he will surely accompany those who come after us, and he will lead us to God's kingdom.

Today I want to talk to you about our traveling companion, Jesus, and what a faithful a companion he is – perhaps more faithful than we recognize or desire him to be. And today I want to help many of you begin to see church in a different light, not just as a place we come to find God but also as a place from which we are sent in order to bring God to others.

2. Old Testament – 10 commandments is what identified Jews. Leads people around

Our Old Testament reading you may recognize as the Ten Commandments, those laws that God chiseled on stone tablets for the Israelites while they were wandering through the wilderness. At this time, the people had no “church” per se. Five chapters down the road, God would instruct them how to build a portable church that they would carry with them wherever they went, and God’s presence leading them onward took the form of a pillar of smoke by day and of fire by night. The Law, which is still held so sacred by our Jewish friends today, was what identified the people as God’s people. It was more than a code of ethics; it identified their God as the one who brought them out of slavery, and the first two commandments made it very clear that the people were not to compromise their faith in God. And this God, in the Hebrew language known as YAHWEH, was a mobile God, leading his people literally from place to place.

3. Jesus is the new temple.

We fast forward a thousand years and we find Jesus, in today’s Gospel reading, in the Temple, which is supposed to be the dwelling place of God, now in a set location, with a set ritual of sacrifice that was supposed to bring the people some sort of access to God’s grace. So people would come, particularly during the Passover holiday, to go through these rituals in order to be cleansed or be forgiven or honor God in some way. And if you compare John’s gospel account with the other Gospel accounts of Jesus “cleansing” the Temple, you notice that John does not have Jesus accusing the moneychangers of turning the Temple into a den of thieves; rather he says that they have turned it into a marketplace. But in a sense the Temple had to be a marketplace for them to perform the rituals necessary for them to have access to God’s grace. They had to exchange their Roman currency for temple currency, then they had to purchase the appropriate animals to sacrifice. Jesus is not accusing anyone of stealing; he’s declaring a new way of accessing God’s grace, namely, through *HIM!* In the Epistle lesson, Paul speaks of the foolishness of the cross; part of that foolishness was that the One we Christians believe to be the Son of God was rejected by the Temple, and crucified outside the city where the Temple was located. Jesus declares in John that *HE IS THE TEMPLE*, a living, breathing, moving temple where God’s love and grace can be accessed. When Jesus heals the sick or restores sight to the blind, those people bow down and worship *HIM* rather than going to the Temple in Jerusalem, exchanging their coins, buying some animal, and giving it to a priest to sacrifice on their behalf. Jesus is a living, breathing, moving temple that cannot be destroyed, and we have access to God’s grace through him.

4. So why do we treat the church as a temple?

And so let’s not make the church into another Temple, as some exclusive habitat for God. Some folks do that, I believe, just as the Jews were doing when Jesus knocked over tables and cracked the whip. Some folks live as if being away from church is being away from God, and that Sunday morning is the one time of the week that they sense God’s presence and God’s grace – I’m glad that you find it in church, but does that mean that we can’t find it elsewhere? David Miller, author of the book *God at Work* drove in the point in this way; he asks a group of clergy, “*How many of you, at the beginning of a new program and school year recognize Sunday School teachers, inviting them to stand, “installing” them, and/or praying for them?*” (All the hands in the room go up.) “*And how many of you, after your annual meeting and election of new church council (or Board of Elders or Vestry) members, recognize them during worship, “installing” or “consecrating” them and/or praying for them.*” (Again, almost all the hands go up.) “*What about our youth?*” Miller goes on. “*When your youth group goes on a mission trip, how many of you commission them before they go or pray for them while they are away?*” (By this time, of course, the response is predictable, as most of the hands are raised.) “*One more question,*” Miller then says. “*How many of you, come late March or early April, invite all of our Certified Public Accountants to stand and pray for them, knowing that for the next several weeks they will work seventy hours or more and that their labor keeps our tax system and government functioning?*” And now there are almost no hands raised in the air.¹ The point that Miller is making is that we pastors tend to overvalue the work that you do *within* the church and undervalue the work you do *outside* the church, as though they were two separate worlds. Walking with Jesus is walking

in the world, and it's bringing the church into the world. We should be celebrating all the good things you do outside these walls, from Monday to Saturday, as well as what you do for Bethel United Methodist Church.

Yes, walking with Jesus means taking church with you, much like those ancient Israelites carried the Ark of the Covenant with them, wherever and whenever they went. When we walk with Jesus, we not only have access to God's grace 24/7; we bring that grace to those we meet, wherever and whenever.

¹ Illustration offered by David Lose in an online article entitled *Igniting Centrifugal Force* (<http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/lent-3-b-igniting-centrifugal-force/>) Dr. Lose quotes from the book *God at Work* by David W. Miller (Oxford, 2007).