

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Each week in our worship together, we confess a faith in one God in three persons, who has created everything that is, seen and unseen using the words of our sanctioned creeds...be it the Apostles' or Nicene Creed and at special times the Athanasian Creed. And today within our first lesson from the Pentateuch's Book of Exodus we find the creating words of the Decalogue coming straight from God. God in this passage is speaking and by God's speaking we have the Mosaic Covenant we know as the 10 Commandments.

Today in our first lesson we hear God saying, I am God, you shall have no other gods and to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy...and then on and on go the commandments. Now given the gravity and the weight of these words we hear today from Exodus, I must say on my initial reading of this passage this past week, I "kinda" chuckled in wonder at these words, "for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..." No, I was not laughing at God...I was laughing at the question it stirred within me...is God really this insecure? Is God really this insecure that God would be jealous? I was merely left to scratch my head in confusion and chuckle in wonderment that the God who created all that is, seen and unseen, is a *jealous* God. This Just didn't make sense to me. Who or what would God be jealous of?!

It was in this moment that I realized that I have restricted my understanding of God with my stupidity by thinking that God would be jealous in the sense of the word jealous, as I understood it. I understood jealous to mean: feeling or showing envy of someone or their achievements and advantages. But there is more to this word jealous than just what I understood it to mean. When checking the Hebrew translation, I learned that "impassioned" would probably be a better translation...for I the Lord your God am an *impassioned* God, instead of: For I the Lord your God am a *jealous* God. Nonetheless, the passage uses jealous in the English translation. So, I went to the English dictionary only to discover that this term jealous can also mean, fiercely protective or vigilant of one's rights or possessions.

From the words of this Mosaic Covenant and from the Gospel that is before us today we hear that God is personally, establishing a bond, not only in words but also through the Incarnate Word Jesus Christ. Throughout our lessons today, we hear of a God who is speaking directly to us, gifting us, redeeming us, and making us His own. And in these words, we hear the One who has created us loves us...deeply and vastly.

We understand love to be an intense feeling of deep affection or a great interest and pleasure in someone or something that leads one to be fiercely protective or vigilant. St Paul captures the essence of love in his letter to the church in Corinth with words that we are all probably familiar with in one way or another. St. Paul speaks of love this way:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It

bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸ Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. ⁹ For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; ¹⁰ but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. ¹³ And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)

We are also reminded of God's passion and love for us in the words of Saint John in his First Epistle:

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. (1 John 3:1)

John goes on to further explain God's love for us, God's children:

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that God loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:9-10)

Not that we loved God but that God loved us...this love is not earned nor rewarded to us, God simply loves us...go figure. Do we as children of God stop and really consider this love for us or have we become so complacent of this love we do not even consider it or simply just assume it to be?

On January 8, 1870, Samuel Clemens wrote an interesting letter to his fiancée, Olivia Langdon. In his letter to his fiancée, Twain deeply contemplates this love in his letter this way:

How insignificant we are, with our pigmy little world! – Does one apple in a vast orchard think as much of itself as we do? I do not see how astronomers can help feeling exquisitely insignificant, for every new page in the Book of the Heavens they open reveals to them more & more that the world we are so proud of is to the universe of careening globes as is one mosquito to the winged & hooved flocks & herds that darken the air & populate the plains and forests of all the earth. If you killed one mosquito would it be missed? What is man, that he should be considered of God?¹

When we look at the vastness of all creation, we are as Mark Twain points out...somewhat insignificant. But have we become so complacent of God's love that we merely see ourselves our thoughts, and our feelings, as deserving much more than just an apple in an orchard or a bug on the windshield of life?

Our ego is the human system that we center ourselves in and in turn it gets in the way of sincerely and graciously seeing God's love for us as the pure gift it truly is. This human system only sees love as a commodity or product that we exchange or receive with certain customers for

¹ From *The Love Letters of Mark Twain*. 1949 pages 133-134, found in *The Bible According to Mark Twain, Writings on Heaven, Eden, and the Flood*. Edited by Howard G. Baetzhold and Joseph B. McCullough. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1995, pages, introduction XV-XVI.

something that is exchanged or received for something else. And as Jesus today in this Gospel lesson uses the temple as a metaphor for his body, I want to use John's version of the cleansing of the temple as a metaphor for the cleansing of our human systems that get in the way of realizing the breadth and depth of God's gift of love for us.

Looking at the Gospel lesson today, we know there are stories common to all four Gospels. A few of these common stories are the feeding of the multitude, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and when Jesus began his ministry in Galilee. Today we have another story common to all four Gospels. Jesus enters his "Father's house," and drives the religious professionals from the temple, saying that they have perverted the true worship of the God of Israel. Looking at the details from Matthew, Mark, and Luke we hear nothing mentioned about any animals and nothing about a whip of cords. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke we just hear Jesus say, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations"? But you have made it a den of robbers.' (Matt 21:13, Mark 11:17, Luke 19:46)

Today from the Gospel of John we hear that same story told this way:

¹⁴ In the temple, Jesus found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making 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. (John 2:14b-16)

Then we hear Jesus say:

'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' (John 2:16b)

We have the "den of robbers" or the "cave or hideout for robbers" in the synoptic Gospels verses the marketplace John mentions. In this we see Jesus attacking or confronting, NOT the specific bad actors, rather Jesus is attacking or confronting the commerce, the "temple system" symbolized in the cattle, sheep, doves, and the money changers and not its abuses or corruption. Jesus is opposing and driving out the system itself and not just the robbers who are selling and trading.

Another factor that points to the system itself is the very location of this story within the Gospels. In the synoptic Gospels this account occurs near the arrest and passion of Jesus but in here in the Gospel of John it occurs in the second chapter. In the synoptics it is believed that this fit of rage by Jesus is reciprocated by the Temple Authority and contributes to his death. By making it personal the synoptic writers are taking the focus off the system that John is pointing out. Today in this Gospel lesson we hear Jesus challenging a religious system that is so embedded in its own rules and practices that the focus is no longer on God but rather the human things or the systems that take place outside of God. In other words, Jesus is driving out those things that get in the way of us recognizing the vastness of God's love...the depth of God's love that we are NOT deserving nor entitled to but simply given out of God's pure and underserving nature of love for us. A love that is NOT just for me and you, but a love for all.

Sadly we use our ego that is our "human system" to incorporate our own understanding of God's love and how that love works...in other words, we only see God's love through our systems

making God's love something that is traded and earned. Then yes, we are just as Twain points out, we are the one apple in a vast orchard that thinks of itself as much more important than the others. But God's love manifest in Jesus Christ breaks down our system by freely giving love as a gift.

In our Holy Eucharist we hear these words being said to us, this is my body, this is my blood, given for you. Before we fill our egos with the importance of self that seems to be said to us, just remember that "you" in that moment – "given for you" is plural, meaning – you all, this is my body, this is my blood, given for you all.

In our Gospel we hear that Jesus, God's love made manifest, God's impassioned and vigilant love is driving out and overturning that which would stand in the way of us recognizing the extraordinary gift of God's love for us. So too within the systems of our misunderstandings and assumptions, God's love made manifest in Jesus Christ overturns and drives out all that would get in the way of our understanding of God's fierce and vigilant love.

Today we gather, we worship, and we confess a faith in a God who has created heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. And while we may only dimly see and understand God's love for us, it is and remains nonetheless a love that is given for us in Jesus Christ...not because we have proven our devotion and earned it, not even because we have loved God first, rather we have received it because God has given His love and continues to give it to all abundantly.

We the church, surrounded by so many systems of our sin and our misunderstandings, gather around the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who is God's love and God's Word made manifest that tells us, feeds us, and strengthens us with a faith that breaks down and drives out any system of sin and death that surrounds us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.