

Order of Service for March 7, 2021 - Lent 3

GATHERING

Confession and Forgiveness

P - Blessed be the holy Trinity †, ever creating, ever transforming, ever enlivening, source of love and liberation, our heart and our home.

C - Amen

P - We are unfinished. Our universe is unfinished. We confess the ways in which we attempt to limit God's creative power working in and through us.

Silence

P - Creating God,

C - Shape us into fruitful co-creators and faithful stewards of your design, liberated by your covenant to bless and be a blessing.

P - In Jesus we have met the one who, with his very life, showed us the power of love to transform the lives of all who are vulnerable. We confess the ways in which we steadfastly cling to our rights and entitlements, refusing to be changed, or even touched, by the world's pain.

Silence

P - Transforming Christ,

C - Move us from comfort to courage, from empathy to engagement, from prayer to policy change.

P - All things belong together; we are many, and we are one. We confess the ways in which we have allowed separation: from God-within-me, from God-within-you, from God-within-creation, to define us.

Silence

P - Enlivening Spirit,

C - Breathe into us the breath of your grace, that we may release our hold on the fear and arrogance that keeps us from knowing wholeness.

P - Beloved, God's forgiveness is fulfilled in Christ. Because we are unfinished, we are ever being recreated. Because we have met Jesus, we are ever being transformed. Because we are both many and one, we are ever being enlivened with the Spirit's power — the grace of God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Forgiveness, grace, and love are yours to have, and yours to share †, now and always.

C - Amen.

Gathering Song - 324, In the Cross of Christ I Glory

In the cross of Christ I glory, tow'ring o'er the wrecks of time.

All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.

When the woes of life o'ertake me, hopes deceive, and fears annoy,
never shall the cross forsake me; lo, it glows with peace and joy.

When the sun of bliss is beaming light and love upon my way,
from the cross the radiance streaming adds more luster to the day.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified;
peace is there that knows no measure, joys that through all time abide.

(Hymn lyrics printed under CCLI Licence # 11411292)

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all.

Prayer of the Day

P - Let us pray. Holy God, through your Son you have called us to live faithfully and act courageously. Keep us steadfast in your covenant of grace, and teach us the wisdom that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C - Amen.

WORD

Hebrew Scriptures Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words:

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me. 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. You 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, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But 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. For 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.

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

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

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 neighbor.

The word of the Lord.

Sermon

Think about a place that quite literally took your breath away. We've all had those experiences; we've all been to certain places which left us gaping, those places which just seemed to be full of God. It might be a shoreline near here, it might be a place you've seen on your travels, it might even be your own back yard!

Now imagine, just for fun, that you have access to unlimited amounts of money, so you can satisfy your every whim. And because of this overwhelming experience of being speechless in some magnificent place, you decide you are going to build a church. You want to honour the presence of God in that place, so you write a check.

But imagine what happens to make this vision a reality. Trees are cut down and grass is dug up. Rock formations are dynamited, and ponds are filled in. The workers throw their pop cans and beer cans and sandwich wrappers on the ground. Bits of wood and steel and nails and tools are chucked into the piles of dirt around the foundations, to be used as back fill. And when the building is done, all you can see... is the building. The view of that fantastic location... is gone. That place is no longer full of the presence of God; it is now only full of a monument which is dedicated to something that no longer exists.

Alexander Schmemmann was a theologian, writer and teacher in the Orthodox church. He said this:

*The quickest way to desecrate a landscape is to build a church on it, because that implies that the **church** is now the "holy ground," and everything else around it is now less holy, if not downright profane.*

I think he might be on to something. It is so easy for us to become enamoured of the wrong things that we can forget what's supposed to be our priority. And the church has done this throughout its history.

If you go to the Holy Land, there are churches all over the place. Any piece of land which can be tied, *in any way*, to an event in Jesus' life, has a church building plopped on it.

And this has not only happened with stories from what we call the New Testament. The church has done this with stories from what we call the Old Testament as well.

During the late Roman Empire days, a small mountain in the Sinai Peninsula was identified as Mount Sinai, where, according to the story from Exodus we just read, Moses was given the 10 Commandment for the people of Israel. So, of course, the Romans built a church on it. Over time, several other small mountains were found in the area which might also have been where this happened. So they built churches and monasteries on all of those hills, too. They wanted to make sure they were covered!

Which means that, if you go there today, you don't see where Moses received the 10 Commandments. You see the churches. And you see the so-called "holy ground" inside those buildings. But no one sees the holiness of the ground around them, because, as we all know, that ground is no longer holy. It's profane, which literally means "outside the temple."

I think we can learn something about this from our Jewish brothers and sisters. You will notice that they did not build temples or synagogues on those "holy sites." That's because they pay attention to the fact that the 10 Commandments don't say anything about putting a building on those spots.

The 10 Commandments weren't given to a building. The 10 Commandments were given to the people. They were rules, given to a **community**, to govern their community's life. God cares much more about how people interact with each other, than with the structures they build.

God doesn't say, "Build a building so everyone can know that this spot is holier than any other spot." Nor does God say, "Build a fortress so you can be safe from all of those others out there who don't believe the way you do."

God says, "**You** are holy. You **people** are sacred. You, my holy **community**, are the way that I will show the world who I am. And that means that the way you live, with me, with yourselves, and with everyone else, it what is truly called to be holy."

We, the church, with our obsession with buildings and structures, need to remember this. Whether we walk into this building, or walk into a cathedral, or walk into St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, we are **not** coming into God's presence. We are stepping into a community, a holy gathering of holy people, called by God, not to be perfect, but to remember that God has brought us together.

So we can trust that we are *supposed* to be together. We can trust that God is among us, in our community. We can trust that presence *so much* that we don't need to kill, or even talk badly about, someone who is in our way. We don't have to steal something, just because everyone else has one. We don't have to worry about our neighbour owning a bigger, more prestigious car, or computer, or anything else.

That's why the most important part of the 10 Commandments, is not actually part of the 10 Commandments! The important part is found just before them, in the first words from our reading from Exodus: *I am the Lord your God*.

It is that fact, that truth, that *relationship*, which establishes everything else. And because it calls *us* holy, everything *else* is holy too. So the only thing we need to build up in response to *that*, is each other.

Amen.

RESPONSE TO THE WORD

Hymn of the Day - 723, Canticle of the Turning

My soul cries out with a joyful shout that the God of my heart is great
And my spirit sings of the wondrous things that you bring to the ones who wait
You fixed your sight on your servant's plight and my weakness you did not spurn
So from East to West will your name be blest, could the world be about to turn?

Refrain

My heart shall sing of the day you bring let the fires of your justice burn
Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, and the world is about to turn!

Though I am small my God, my all you work great things in me
And your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be
Your very name puts the proud to shame and to those who before you yearn
You will show your might put the strong to flight, for the world is about to turn. *Refrain*

From the halls of power to the fortress tower, not a stone will be left on stone.
Let the king beware for your justice tears ev'ry tyrant from his throne.
The hungry poor shall weep no more, for the food they can never earn;
There are tables spread, ev'ry mouth be fed, For the world is about to turn. *Refrain*

Though the nations rage from age to age, we remember who holds us fast:
God's mercy must deliver us from the conqueror's crushing grasp.
This saving word that our forebears heard is the promise which holds us bound,
'Til the spear and rod can be crushed by God, who is turning the world around. *Refrain*

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Prayers of the People

A - Relying on the promise of God, we pray boldly for the world, the church, and all in need.

[*Short pause*]

A - Holy One, there is no place that is not holy for you. Unlock our awareness, so we may not limit you to certain locations, and may see your presence everywhere.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One, there is no person who is not holy for you. Free us from our preconceptions about others, and enable us to receive the gift that you give in all people.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One, there is no thing that is not holy for you. Release us from viewing the world around us as simply raw material for our own use or profit, that we may begin serving your creation as you have called us.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One, you call your church to holiness. Liberate us from seeking status; liberate us *for* humility and service.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One, every day, every moment, is an opportunity to encounter you. Open us to your presence in our work, in our relationships, in our illness, and in our pain. Move us to share your love with those we name before you.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

A - Holy One, all of life is holy. May we enter each moment, each interaction, each decision as pregnant with possibility to respond to your loving presence.

[*Silence*]

In your unbounded mercy,

C - Hear our prayer.

P - Into your hands we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

C - Amen.

Lord's Prayer

P - And now we pray as Jesus taught us:

C - Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

SENDING

Benediction

P - You are what you were created to be:
created in Christ Jesus for good works,
chosen to be holy and beloved,
freed to serve your neighbour.
God so bless you that you may be a blessing,

in the name of the holy and (†) life-giving Trinity.
C - Amen.

Dismissal

P - Go in peace. Share the good news.
C - Thanks be to God!

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