

Third Sunday After Lent
Sunday, March 7, 2021

When I say *this age*, I mean all of the time since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden. In this age, we are constantly in a battle for control. We see this throughout our human history. We see it in the politics of nations. We see it in our homes and in the church. We humans like to think we have the ability to control things. It is the human sinful condition. Why do I say this? Because our real struggle is with the fact that all things are in the hands of the Lord.

When God spoke the Ten Commandments to Moses, he was not introducing anything new. As long as there have been thinking people, there have been those who understood that common sense, natural law, or by whatever name you call it, has existed. One does not take by force from another. What is yours is yours. You cannot do as you please, but in order for society to be society, we must live within certain boundaries. There really never has been any kind of “new” morality. Sure, some cultures allow multiple spouses, but all agree you cannot just have anyone that you please. Some cultures have justified certain murders, but you cannot just wantonly kill others. There are boundaries built around ownership. What is striking is how similar these things are, no matter the time in history or the culture we view. What our Lord gave Moses is etched in our hearts. But we sinners have become masterful in justifying our behaviors to get around what is natural to the whole.

If we understand this simple principle, we realize the problem. Yes, we may well rightly judge what another is doing, but do we make the same judgement of ourselves? Sadly, most often, the answer is, “No.” Best used, the Ten Commandments are something we need to use in order to answer what we confess each week when we say, “If we say we have no sin . . .” I can ask you, “How are you doing?” Don’t answer me, but go to your secret place and engage with the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes, the Lord does not have us deal with our own sin issues until we are ready to deal with them. But when the Holy Spirit brings us to that place, we do well to be engaged and go to work. I fear that too many Christians think that the Lord just forgives us and sends us on our way. The part of being conformed to the image of Christ can be forgotten. Our Lord came to make of you and me children of the Heavenly Father. This is the business we’re about – becoming like Christ. He will settle for nothing less than the whole of you.

Before we dive in further, let us consider the proposition that St. Paul places before us. We just heard last week that Jesus gave us instructions to take up our cross and follow Him. No one likes to stand in the corner and think about what they’ve done wrong. But sometimes, the Lord places us in a spiritual timeout for us to reflect upon the need we have to take up our cross and follow Jesus. For those who go down the trail of thinking this nonsense – and I have had great fear for some who seem to think this way – they, we, I can fall into the trap of rebuking the Lord and thinking of these things as foolishness. The power of God comes to us through the cross. The power of reconciliation comes by grace, yes, but often only when we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

What this means is that our Lord gives us, by grace, a new way of seeing things. Rather than going down the trail – which many seem to do – of thinking of this age in terms of right and wrong, we are called to look at things through Jesus’ eyes. He looks at us with eyes of true love.

Love is not a feeling. Love is not even an action. Love is what happens when there is good. Because we know that only the Father is good, we do well to not make a law of these things. When we become enmeshed in what God is doing – and this is, in part, what Jesus means when He says we are to abide in Him – then we are living love. What we call love and what

Scripture means when it says God is love are often two different things. We think in terms of what we feel or think rather the reality of who God is.

Maybe this is why we sometimes have a hard time with the reality of Jesus turning over the tables in the Temple. We ask the question, "What would Jesus do," without realizing that there is the possibility that Jesus just might overturn the tables. In fact, when it comes to sin in our own lives, that is exactly what He will do.

It was close to this time of year and Jesus went up to the Temple mount. No, Jesus was not re-writing the law. Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the Temple for His dedication on the eighth day. There were two doves, or whatever may have been required, as a sacrifice that day. Jesus was without sin, so the actual function is not what upset Jesus. What was upsetting was the thing we sinners have a tendency to do. We make things into a system and believe that if we just jump through the right hoops, all will be well. I remind you that Jesus has come to conform us to His image. He is zealous about this.

In those days, in keeping with the traditions that developed over time, the pharisees determined that one could not use Roman or other foreign money to make purchases for sacrifices. If you've ever exchanged money at an airport, you know they make a few pennies on each dollar. For the Temple, it became quite a money-making scheme as not only "official" sanctuary money was required, but the rates of exchange were also set. Each level of transaction made money. In ancient tradition, people from all over the Roman world came to make sacrifice at the Temple. What God asked and what men did with it were far apart. The faithful people who were seeking to do what was pleasing to the Lord now became a means for fund raising. This was at the heart of the Reformation. Jesus constantly has to overturn the tables on those who, for their own reasons, loose the heart of what God will teach us through His commandments.

I want to share a little pet peeve I have with modern depictions of Jesus. He was raised with the ability to do carpentry. There was no Binford ten thousand power tools. If you needed to carve a beam for a building, it was done by hand. Jesus walked everywhere. He was in His thirties, physically speaking. The boy had guns on Him. He was not some messily soft spoken effeminate wimp. The tables on the Temple mount were probably heavy wood tables that were over one hundred pounds. Put into your mind that Jesus was strong in body as well as in spirit. He needed to be for what would happen on the cross. The wimpy characters that are often portrayed would have not lasted through the punishment inflicted upon Him before being hung on the cross.

The leaders of the Temple could not argue with Jesus. He was right. They knew that He knew what they were doing. What did they do? They asked a good question, "By what authority are You doing these things?" Jesus answer was not what we might expect. He was specifically tying Himself to the Temple. "Make a sacrifice of me and on the third day, I will be resurrected." All of what God did in the Old Testament points to Jesus. When Jesus comes to be the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world, this is a fulfillment of all of the prophecies.

We are encouraged to look to Jesus as He is and not as we imagine He ought to be in our minds. He is the One who has accomplished for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Trust that what the Lord is asking of us, is exactly what is needed, not only for now, but for all time and eternity. Be guided by His goodness and mercy and know that the Lord, who is love, will bring you to be with Him forever. He will teach us to fear and love Him with all of our body, mind, soul, and strength and above all things.