

Sermon  
Lent 3-B  
Saint Andrew's, Methuen  
March 7, 2021  
William Bradbury

Exodus 20:1-17  
Psalm 19  
1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
John 2:13-22

From some surveys taken around 2007, we learn 74% of Americans could name all three Stooges -- Moe, Larry, and Curley but 60 % of Americans cannot name five of the Ten Commandments. Only 14% can name all ten.

That number would have been much higher in the colonial period, since many colonial churches, like Old North in Boston, had on the wall behind the altar two big plaques—one containing the Apostles' Creed and the other the Ten Commandments.

If our churches today put the Ten Commandments back up and taught them more in Sunday school, do you think we the people would know them better and therefore obey them better?

You'll remember Judge Roy Moore who, after he became chief justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama, placed a two-ton marble monument of the Ten Commandments in the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

Because he refused to remove this Moore was removed from the Court.

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So I ask you: Would there be less lying, stealing, adultery, better treatment of parents and keeping the Sabbath, if everyone knew all 10 commandments?

I certainly believe kids in Sunday school should learn the commandments. They are listed in the Holy Eucharist Penitential Office and in the Outline of Faith in the Book of Common Prayer, because they teach us the behavior which is necessary for any society to thrive.

Just as a loving parent teaches their children not to touch a hot stove or to run out into traffic, so our loving God teaches us the ten things that are necessary for creating a thriving society.

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**But here's the thing:** God tells Moses to build a box—what the Bible calls an Ark, “out of acacia wood, 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high. <sup>11</sup> Cover it with pure gold inside and out and put a gold border all around it...<sup>16</sup> Then put in the Box the two stone tablets that I will give you, on which the commandments are written.”

(If you saw the classic 1981 movie “Raiders of the Lost Ark” starring Harrison Ford, you’ve got a good picture of the ark.)

Then God says to Moses: “Make a lid of pure gold, 45 inches long and 27 inches wide. <sup>18</sup> Make two winged creatures of hammered gold, <sup>19</sup> one for each end of the lid. Make them so that they form one piece with the lid. <sup>20</sup> The winged creatures are to face each other across the lid, and their outspread wings are to cover it. <sup>21</sup> Put the two stone tablets inside the Box and put the lid on top of it.”

**This cover is called the Mercy Seat, because** God says, “<sup>22</sup> **I will meet you there...from above the lid between the two-winged creatures....**” Exodus 25:9-25 Good News Bible

**God wants the people to be in a direct and personal relationship with their Creator, instead of in a transactional relationship with a list of laws, no matter how good they are.**

**Because when that happens, when the 10 Commandments replace a living relationship with God, bad things happen.**

Paul also points out in Romans 7 that: “if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” <sup>8</sup> But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness.”

Thus the old joke: Moses comes down Mt. Sinai and tells the people, “I have good news and bad news. The good news is I talked God down to just 10. The bad news is adultery is still one of them.”

**With this mindset the Law becomes a wall between us and God.**

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Long before Jesus’s time, the ark and the stone tablets were lost, but now the Temple itself is the place God dwells in order to lead and judge the people. The whole purpose of worshipping in the Temple isn’t to call God down from heaven, but rather it is to connect with the God who is always with them in the Temple.

As Anglican bishop and New Testament scholar, Tom Wright says, **“The temple was the beating heart of Judaism.” It was he says, “the centre of worship and music, of politics and society, of national celebration and mourning.”** John for Everyone, page 25

So, in his prophetic act of cleansing the temple, Jesus is like a doctor announcing that this heart of the nation is sick and in need of healing.

The problem is that the temple has become a barrier, not a conduit to God: Jesus says it is supposed to be the House where we can connect with the Father, but we have turned it into a place where we only connect with ourselves.

**A living cathedral has become a dead museum.**

How many of our churches can this be said of today?

**Are people connecting to the Living God in our churches or only connecting to the narcissism of their specialness?**

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This is the existential question for any church today. **Is our community and our worship a doorway into a transforming relationship with God? Is it the House of our Father or is it just our house?**

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Shortly after Jesus cleanses the Temple, we find him in Samaria, sitting alone by Jacob's well. A Samaritan woman comes to draw water and they have a profound discussion about the nature of God and how we connect with the Divine.

Near the end of the conversation Jesus says, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... **For the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.** <sup>24</sup> **God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth.**"

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Knowing the 10 Commandments is important; but not nearly as important as knowing Jesus and following him in the power of the Spirit.

Which is why the Apostle Paul asks the church members in Corinth and asks you and me today: **"Do you not realize that you are a temple of God with the Spirit of God living in you?"** New Jerusalem Bible--1 Corinthians 3:16