



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

**Lent 3, Year B**  
**March 4, 2018**

**[RCL] Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22**

### **Exodus 20:1-17**

The recitation of the Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, will likely be familiar to listeners of this week's Old Testament reading, and many might have images of a technicolor Charlton Heston descending from the mountain, tablets in hand. But what's striking in this reading is that God—not Moses—is speaking directly to the Israelites. Hearing directly from the Divine would have left quite an impact on these former Egyptian slaves as they made their way through the desert.

There's an order to the commandments as well—get in right relationship with God (the first four commandments) and then you can be in right relationship with each other (the remaining six). The directives aren't meant to micro-manage our lives, but to apply constant pressure, the pressure of discipleship and formation, that can continue to guide us toward a life that is in right relationship with God, creation, and each other.

- Where are some areas where we are individually or collectively out of synch with God's directives?
- What are some small practices that we might initiate to help re-form our lives to be in better relationship with God and with each other?

### **Psalm 19**

The psalm opens with what might be imagined as a wondrous cacophony of sound as all creation attests to God's glory. Each day eagerly shouts to the next, and each night whispers God's glory above our slumber—yet the sounds aren't heard (v. 3). One is tempted to hold an ear to the ground to catch even a glimmer of the joyous noise.

It takes God's laws and decrees—Torah—to help translate the celestial symphony for our ears. By letting ourselves be molded by God's directives, we can begin to hear and see the glorious celebration going on around us all the time. Finally, as we journey deeper and deeper into our relationship with God—allowing ourselves to be formed and shaped and forgiven—we can humbly submit our own voice to the worship, with the plea: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." What a joyous noise indeed!

- Where can we hear the celebration of God’s glory in the world around us? What is it calling us to do in response?

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

When looked at from the outside—as many of the Greeks and Jews of Corinth would have seen them—these Christ believers had an “upside-down” view of reality. Weakness is strength and death is salvation. The Apostle Paul highlights the paradox of the cross and establishes a neat dichotomy to drive unity for the church in Corinth: be among those who are perishing or with those who are living. Who wouldn’t choose life, under the circumstances?

Paul is trying to mend a divided church in Corinth, where the wealthy members, lured by the Corinthian ideal of clever oratory (and possibly disappointed with Paul’s own admitted mumblings) are tempted to segregate from their poorer counterparts and create their own ideal of church. Paul recognizes that they are missing the point. He forces them—and us—to stare directly into the shame and tragedy of the cross and, in so doing, put all humankind on equal footing. None of us is greater than another—no matter what our earthly skills or accomplishments might suggest—and all are far weaker than God’s apparent weakness and more foolish than God’s seeming foolishness.

- What divisions do we still see that threaten to divide us today? How might a Divine view of things yield solidarity across division?

## John 2:13-22

This week’s gospel reading plays with the notion of time in a number of ways. First, Jesus’ disruption at the Temple takes place at the beginning of his mission, not at the end as it appears in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Second, his zeal causes his disciples to reflect back on Psalm 69—“Zeal for your house has eaten me up”—as Jesus unexpectedly turns over tables and throws money on the floor. Finally, there’s what might be called a memory nugget—something said that might not make total sense in the moment but, in hindsight, is clear as day. When asked for a sign, Jesus radically states that the temple, under construction for many years, can be razed and reconstructed in merely three days. One imagines the quizzical looks exchanged by the disciples in the moment, their own disbelief at Jesus’ wild overture. Only in looking back, through the lens of Jesus’ death and resurrection, would the statement make sense. What seemed an impossible claim in the moment would become, in the end, a proof point that Jesus as Christ had replaced the earthly temple once and for all.

- What memory nuggets in your own formation, in retrospect, serve as proof points for your own faith?
- What difficult or challenging events or, conversely, times of wonder and awe, still serve to strengthen your faith?

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