

LENT 3

Year B

Erica Andersen is a senior residential student at Nashotah House Theological Seminary and is an aspirant to the priesthood in the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas. She serves as seminarian at Trinity Episcopal Church, Wauwatosa, Wisconsin. She previously studied English literature, classics, and Montessori education. For many years she was a homeschooling parent and community volunteer. Her hobbies include language learning, reading, hiking, gardening, and crochet. She is passionate about teaching God's word to people of all ages. Erica and her husband Tim have three children.

Exodus 20:1-17

20 Then God spoke all these words,

²“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me.

⁴“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. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or serve 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 ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷“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.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

This week's Old Testament reading begins with God reminding the Hebrew people that God has delivered them from slavery in Egypt. God's nature is to liberate. God desires to set God's people free, both physically and spiritually. The Bible teaches us that true freedom is found through relationship with God. This reminder is followed by the Ten Commandments, also called the Decalogue, which provides structure for this life of freedom that God has gifted the Hebrew people.

The commandments teach the Hebrews (and us) the basics about how we are to relate to God and to one another. The first two commandments, having no other god before God and refraining from idol worship, seem simple to keep, but the ancient Hebrews struggled with them, and likewise so do we. It is so easy to make idols out of money, technology, wealth, status, pleasure, perfectionism, success. When we do this, we forfeit the freedom that God wants us to have and enslave ourselves to these idols.

The third commandment, about keeping God's name holy, can be hard for our modern minds to grasp, but the reverence with which we treat God helps us put God above any person or experience and protects us from falling into idol worship. The fourth commandment instructs God's people that they must rest and reserve the day for God. These first four commandments provide a foundation for the ones that follow, reminding us that our relationship with God forms the foundation for ethical interactions with people.

The fifth through ninth commandments require us to care for our parents in their old age and to refrain from murder, adultery, theft, and lying. The last commandment reminds us to cut off sin at its root, to stop ourselves when we desire what other people have, lest our desires escalate into harmful actions.

Discussion Questions

What idols do you think are the most common in today's culture, and how can we turn away from them and focus our worship on God?

As Christians, how do we observe the spirit of the Sabbath, deliberately setting aside time for rest and spiritual growth?

Psalm 19

- ¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, *
and the firmament shows his handiwork.
- ² One day tells its tale to another, *
and one night imparts knowledge to another.
- ³ Although they have no words or language, *
and their voices are not heard,
- ⁴ Their sound has gone out into all lands, *
and their message to the ends of the world.
- ⁵ In the deep has he set a pavilion for the sun; *
it comes forth like a bridegroom out of his chamber;
it rejoices like a champion to run its course.
- ⁶ It goes forth from the uttermost edge of the heavens
and runs about to the end of it again; *
nothing is hidden from its burning heat.
- ⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect and revives the
soul; *
the testimony of the LORD is sure and gives
wisdom to the innocent.
- ⁸ The statutes of the LORD are just and rejoice the
heart; *
the commandment of the LORD is clear and
gives light to the eyes.
- ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean and endures for
ever; *
the judgments of the LORD are true and
righteous altogether.
- ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, more than
much fine gold, *
sweeter far than honey, than honey in the
comb.
- ¹¹ By them also is your servant enlightened, *
and in keeping them there is great reward.
- ¹² Who can tell how often he offends? *
cleanse me from my secret faults.
- ¹³ Above all, keep your servant from presumptuous
sins; let them not get dominion over me; *
then shall I be whole and sound, and innocent
of a great offense.
- ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of
my heart be acceptable in your sight, *
O LORD, my strength and my redeemer.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

The first line of Psalm 19 begins, “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork.” With natural imagery, the psalmist praises God for the beauty and wonder of creation. Day and night are personified, pointing to the wonder of the order of the cosmos and the miracle of the creation of time.

Beginning in verse 7, the psalmist then praises God for the law and the structure it provides. This echoes the theme of liberation in today’s passage from Exodus, that the structure and ethical way of life provided by God are meant to set us free. The psalmist says of God’s judgments, “More to be desired are they than gold... sweeter far than honey” (Ps 19:10). So often, the word “judgment” causes anxiety, but the psalm reminds us that we are to look forward to God’s judgments because they will bring justice and peace.

Finally, verses 12-13 ask God for spiritual cleansing. Perhaps the Collect for Purity, which we pray at the beginning of each Eucharist, was influenced by Psalm 19. Near the end of the psalm, the psalmist asks to be made “whole and sound.” The psalmist encourages us to trust in God’s goodness and God’s ability to complete us.

Discussion Questions

What experiences of nature point you toward God’s glory?

What do you think about the psalmist’s view of God’s judgments as being desirable and sweet?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸ For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

Paul writes passionately to the church at Corinth about his identity as a Christian and the centrality of the cross. Paul says that Christians “proclaim Christ crucified.” To die on the cross was not only shameful to Jews, but it was understood to be a kind of curse (cf. Deuteronomy 21:23). To Gentiles who followed the state religion, it was complete foolishness to worship a crucified god. The cross was a source of ridicule—why would a god allow himself to be executed in such a horrific way?

At first, Paul himself did not believe the story of a crucified Messiah. He persecuted Christians until his encounter with the risen Jesus on the way to Damascus. Now, he proclaims the Gospel to anyone who will listen, and, again and again, he must explain to a shocked audience about his crucified Lord. He must explain how Jesus’ death on the cross is not an example of God’s weakness but of God’s power.

The cross remains central to the Christian story: The God who created the universe out of nothing can turn the most unimaginable evil into joy and new life. God can do the impossible, and God’s ways are completely unexpected, defying the understanding of the most educated people. Human reason can only take us so far because God’s wisdom will always surpass it.

Discussion Questions

Does the cross still defy the wisdom of the world in our time?

How can we better proclaim Christ crucified to a world hungry for hope?

John 2:13-22

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Commentary from Erica Andersen

Some people think that the Gospel of John emphasizes Jesus' divinity over his humanity. However, in John's Gospel for today, we see Jesus struggling with a very human emotion: anger. Corruption and greed have crept into God's house. Using a whip, Jesus drives from the temple of all who have made it into a marketplace. He overturns the tables. He causes quite a chaotic scene, with people, coins, and livestock being scattered.

This is not the image that we usually think of when we think of Jesus. Most of us tend to imagine Jesus on the cross or at the empty tomb; we imagine Jesus teaching, healing, feeding, or gathering little children to him. When we display images of Jesus in our homes or churches, we are unlikely to select an image of an angry Jesus making a mess of the temple. This is a disruptive Jesus, one who would not be ignored, nor can we ignore this side of Jesus.

This story is an opportunity to grow in our understanding of who Jesus was, to more fully comprehend that Jesus was truly human and that, although he did not sin, he understands our weaknesses (cf. Hebrews 14:5).

Following this disruption, Jesus speaks of himself as the temple and says that it will be raised after three days. Although the Pharisees and disciples did not understand what he meant at the time, the disciples understood the meaning after Jesus' death: Jesus replaces the temple; Jesus himself is the ultimate offering of love, reconciling us to God.

Discussion Questions

What does this passage tell us about righteous anger?

Is it hard for you to imagine Jesus with a whip, turning over tables, and yelling or speaking sternly?