

Promise of Justice

Promise of Lent: Part 3 “Promise of Justice”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – March 7, 2021

3rd Sunday in Lent

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

Reflection: Psalm 19

Greeting: Come, let us walk in the light of the Lord, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. (*Isaiah 2:5,3c*)

Prayer: Everlasting God, because of your tender mercy toward all people, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all should follow the example of his great humility. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of his patience through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 19

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun, which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 19 and we hear of God's greatness. His creation testifies to his glory. We hear of how God's ways are right and good. That what we get from the Lord is better than anything you could hope for on earth. Better than riches and good food. We are called to ask God to help us be better people. How do you ask God to help you improve yourself? How do you seek God's justice in your life? How do you seek it for all?

Prayer: Almighty God, your blessed Son was led by the Spirit to be tempted by Satan. Come quickly to help us who are assaulted by many temptations. And, as you know the weakness of each of us, let each one find you mighty to save. May you hear our prayer and guide us in these 40 days on our way to the cross; through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our first reading is from Exodus chapter 20, verses 1 through 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. Honor 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 neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.
(Exodus 20:1-17 NRSV*)

Our next reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verses 18 through 25.

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. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks

desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

(1 Corinthians 1:18-25 NRSV)*

Our last reading is from John chapter 2, verses 13 through 22.

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

(John 2:13-22 NRSV)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

As we continue on our Lenten journey this week, we come to a promise of justice. And we get some interesting readings for this. The main focus today is going to be on the Gospel reading. But I want to touch base on our Old Testament reading for today. Because it's a very familiar reading. We have the 10 Commandments. I don't want to focus in on the content of the commandments specifically, but what they point to because it helps us to understand our Gospel reading and understand this promise of justice. Because the foundation of these rules is not simply arbitrary rules to make rules. It's a set of rules to say this is what you shouldn't do if you're going to have a society based on justice. And they aren't the only rules. They're the opening of the law. The opening that says here's where we begin. And we go from here into laws that specify how people can get justice and constant calls that justice must be upheld for all people.

So, when we look at the Gospel reading for today, it can be a little unusual. It can also be a little confusing because the story happens in all four gospels, but in John it takes place early in Christ's ministry instead of late. It can be a little confusing when we're trying to place it in a timeline, because John tells the story of Jesus in a very different way than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as we have discussed before. I want to focus in on the justice being sought out. Because we see Jesus in Jerusalem, and in the Temple there are people selling cattle, sheep, doves and also changing money. And it's important to understand exactly why they're there. These are all things that you would need in order to make offerings. Things that you would have to purchase. The money changers are there because often you'd have to have exchange

Roman money for money with no image on it so that it would be allowed in the temple. And the problem is that this has become not a public service but a money making venture. It's become a way to prey upon people needing these things, especially if they've traveled a large distance. Bringing things with them may not be possible. And especially when we look at those who are selling doves. The reason for this is because when we look at the way that things are set up, if you are unable to make an offering of the larger animal, there's justice for the poor that they still have an option that they could use doves as their sacrifice. The reason for this is that no one's left out. That if they don't have the larger animal to offer up there is an option available to them. However, now it's being used as a way to exploit the poor by selling these things at the temple. People making money off of people wanting to get right with God.

Jesus makes a scene. One that people might frown upon when they read it because it's not nice. It's not polite. It's destructive. Sometimes it can be hard to understand this situation. But what we have is Jesus making a whip of cords and he drives the animals out. He overturns the tables of the money changers and pours out their coins. This is not a peaceful protest. Reading this, we might start shifting uncomfortably in our seats. We could make excuses. We could try to find all sorts of ways to get around the uncomfortableness. We could try to play mental gymnastics with it to make it all right and warp it into something easy. But I think the simple explanation is the one given. That his disciples remember "zeal for your house will consume me." His passion for justice, for God's justice, has overwhelmed him. And he has no time to be polite to the vultures preying upon the people. He makes a scene. He's overturning businesses. He's driving out their inventory. Why? Because it wasn't right. Here we come to a point that intersects with our reading from First Corinthians. It's always been this way the Jews say to him. What sign can you show us for doing this? And it's mentioned in our reading from First Corinthians that there's a demand for signs. And that Christ crucified is a stumbling block to that. And we get an allusion to the crucifixion, "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They think he's talking about destroying the actual temple. As John says, he was speaking of the temple of his body. And I think in some ways, he's also referring to restoring faith. Restoring justice. It can be hard to understand, but we're also told that the Greeks desire wisdom, and the crucifixion is a stumbling block there because it seems to be foolishness. That God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom.

The question we have to come back to is, what can we learn from this? What should we take away? To me, it's the zeal for justice. That there's a promise for justice, and Christ is seeking to restore faith in that promise. Because it would become worrisome. If you felt like getting right with God requires that you go through exchanging money and buying the right things, it doesn't make you feel closer to God. I can't help but read this and feel like it starts to look like a sham. That there's people profiting off of the suffering of others. People who are interested in making money off of those coming to honor God. I think this is why that anger comes out so strongly. Because those people are turning God into a business. They don't have

any respect for God's justice, for God's mercy, or God's love. They're there to make a buck off of God.

It's interesting, when we read John this is early in Christ's ministry and it seems to put a target on his back. In the other three Gospel accounts, this is close to the end and makes it seem like this may have been one of those steps too far. That the status quo has been interrupted. And we cannot have the status quo be interrupted. The problem is that those who liked the way things worked didn't want things to change. People don't like change. Not even if it means a greater justice for all. They don't like change because it means that they have to look at themselves and say, "Is there something that I need to do differently?" They don't like change because they have to wonder if all these things that they've been doing all this time might have been harming somebody and they never thought about it, never realized it. And if that's true, what else have they been doing? And I started thinking about this because of the introspection that we have in Lent. I also thought it was interesting because of some recent headlines. It seems like things are changing. Things are always changing. The trick is figuring out if we're constantly moving towards more justice, towards more grace. And maybe it seems like foolishness sometimes. But God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. Does it really hurt us to be more graceful? To be kinder? To be more loving and more caring? To want to expand justice to where others finally feel that they have justice as well? That their voice is heard? That when they cry out, they do not cry out alone? They cry out and are heard. If we know God hears them, shouldn't we?

From my experience, there will always be more room for justice. There will always be more room for change. There will always be more room to do things better. There will always be more room for love. What I take from our reading today isn't that we have to get destructive. It isn't that we have to become violent. There's a whole other sermon about the fact that a riot is the language of the unheard. Today, what I want to take away is that it was that zeal then and there to want to do something to make a difference. To do something to make people stand up and take notice of the injustice going on right under their noses. To let those suffering know that somebody saw. Because I can't help but hear that last bit. "And they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." That he was right. That no matter how angry it might have made people and how uncomfortable it might have made things; he was speaking of justice and he was right. God's promised justice to all people. Part of our covenant is to seek justice for all people. As we travel to the cross, seeing God's mercy for all people and God's love for all people, let us remember that promise of justice that we may be more ready to seek justice for all, understanding it may not always be comfortable and it may not always make everyone happy. But we do it because God calls us to be a people that have a zeal for his love and his justice. And that we remember the promise that God's salvation is for all, and God's justice is for all. That Christ went to the cross for all that all may be saved. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God of grace and glory, we thank you that you judge us not by the perfection of our actions, but by our readiness to live boldly by faith. Help us, as individuals and as a congregation, to trust you and follow where you lead, that in Christ your name may be glorified in all the earth. In these forty days, may God's grace be shown to us all, cleansing us from our sins, and restoring us in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Promise of Lent

Our series is *Promise of Lent* and looks at the ways that we view God's promises during the season of Lent. Each week we look at the promises in a different light.

February 21st – *Promise of New Beginnings* - Genesis 9:8-17; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

February 28th – *Promise Everlasting* – Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38

March 7th – *Promise of Justice* – Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

March 14th – *Promise of Salvation* – Numbers 21:4-9; Ephesians 2:1-10; John 3:14-21

March 21st – *Promise and Patience* – Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 5:5-10; John 12:20-33

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Eric Veach	Cathy Devall
Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer	Henry Catey
Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Don Stewart	Anne Winkler Heinrichs		Michael & Makenzie Reynolds
Ronnie Winstead	John Millsap	Annie McMorris	Dwight Parsons
Trinity Powers	Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family
Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Family of Lois Woolever	Mary White
Nick Nichols	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Greg Williams
Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte
Kim Hennes	Residents of the Greenup Nursing Center		

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