

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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Third Sunday in Lent

Exodus 20:1-17

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I 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.

⁴You 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 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, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹For six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹For 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.

¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³You shall not murder.

¹⁴You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵You shall not steal.

¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷You 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.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸For 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. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰Where 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? ²¹For 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. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are

the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

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, both 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 market-place!" 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.

“At Cross Purposes”

Silas Marner, the lead character in the dramatic novel by George Elliot is often depicted in artwork as old, hunched over, and with eyes of deception. When we encounter Silas, we encounter him there in the quiet darkness of little cottage bathing his hands in gold coins. The light emanating from the fire place reveals a look of glee on his face.

This is his routine; he does it every evening before it is time to lie down for bed. He removes the lose hearth stone. Under that hearth stone he has placed his sewn bag that contains the coins he has rightly earned as the weaver of Raveloe. And night after night, the routine is the same. He moves the stone, pulls out the bag, and counts the coins. His delight is in the hidden wealth that by the light of day no one will ever see.

As he runs the coins over his fingers and feels their coolness against his skin, he has a look of accomplishment, a look of bliss, a look of happiness that fills his pointed boney face with glee.

Only a few pages into the novel, the reader is convinced they know the truth about old Silas. He is just a miserable miser whose only love is

money. After all, he has this rather strange nightly obsession with counting and ostentatiously handling the coins. He does it all in secret. Alas, the plot thickens, and Silas' money is stolen.

There is much more to the novel, but I am intrigued with the question of how Silas came to take such delight in his hidden treasure. How was it that his nightly ritual of counting the cash came to be? What made him hoard that money away beneath the hearth stone?

Whiles such questions are not answered in the book, I do believe some analysis and retrospective thinking can answer the question. Indeed I do not think that Silas set out to spend the end of each day playing with his gold. I do not think that was how he planned his life or would have described his purpose. Nonetheless this is where he ended up; it was where he arrived.

It may have started when he first carried home that extra gold coin. That first time that his weaving business was successful enough that the day's wages did not have to be entirely spent at the marketplace, ah that was the day he had that extra gold coin in his pocket and when he arrived home he had to decide what to do with it. At some point, maybe after a half dozen or more of those gold coins had accumulated he realized that during the day while he was out, almost anyone could break in and steal the money.

Eventually he realized the stone was lose at the hearth and it would make a great hiding place. Then one evening he arrived home and thought, "I better check on the money." It was there. And then he made the bag to put it in. And then more coins. And more counting and tallying. And then, as if it had always been that way, he fell into the routine of running his fingers through those coins.

He never set out to have this nightly routine. He never set out to be a miser. He never set out to find joy in his money.

There is a term for that. It is called accommodation. Accommodation is when something results and one does not really know how one arrived there.

Silas never planned on being this person. But it was where he ended up by accommodation. It crept into his realm of existence so silently and so gradually, that he could hardly notice.

Accommodation. We have accommodated. We are accommodators. We are the accommodated ones.

There Moses was on the mountain of God as God hews from stone these two tablets of law. I won't go into all the details of how they ended up at the mountain and what happens with the golden calf, etc... You've seen the movie; maybe you've even read the book. This law, these 10 laws are given to the people of God as they make their exodus and head for the Promised Land.

Can't you just see it—Charlton Heston there with that shekina glory of God glowing off him holding those two God's finger carved tablets of commandments. And we know that the first of those commandments or laws deals with humanity's relationship to God. The second tablet of law deals with our relationships with each other.

And as you read those 10 laws, inside of you and me is that voice that says, "Yea, I'm all about this. This makes good sense. I'm all for it. I

agree. This is how we should live before God and how we should treat each other. This is a good way for us to order ourselves and even our society and our church and our family too.”

We say that, but then along the way of living our day to day life. It somehow becomes okay for us never to really cease what we are doing and rest in God. Somehow in the flow of everyday life we have made it okay to use bad language to tell lies and to lift post-it notes from work for use at home.

We might not use the word covet, but we know how to keep up with the Jones. We rationalize our lusts and our lies. We allow the death penalty to stand. We trash our relationships. We love conditionally. We become convinced that we are in the right and they are in the wrong. We know it all—so much so that we become the idol of our living.

“Thou shalt have no other God’s before me.” Shwooshssh (that is the sound of the finger of God writing on the tablet of stone. Movie sound effects—oh, cool. How Hollywood!)

We still think they are great laws—we think they bring great order for how we should live. But, over time we have come to justify how we live in brokenness with God and with each other. We think it’s enough to live in connection with some like us and it’s enough to live in connection with God on our own time schedule when it is convenient and there is not a better option.

We have accommodated.

We are the people of accommodation. We would never have set out for this just to be good moral theory. If we were asked we would say we practice it, but when we look...well....we have our secrets beneath the hearth stone too.

It is John's positioning of the story that is attention grabbing. The synoptic gospels as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, place the story near the end of Jesus' ministry and make it part of or at the least near the passion narratives. But here in the Gospel of John such is not the case. Indeed, here in John's gospel this story of the cleansing of the temple is placed at the point of Jesus' first public appearance.

There had been the turning of water into wine at the private wedding party, but now his first real public act is this one. Some think that this is a hot-head Jesus who without thinking this carefully through reacts in anger and harsh tones. Even John seems to want to explain away the drastic and almost violent response of Jesus here.

But a close study of the text reveals that this a calculated response on the part of Jesus. He doesn't just blow up and push over a table here and there. No, he uses a whip. And some of the source documents would have us not merely use the word "make" as in "making a whip of cords..." Rather, they would have us translate that as "braid." So the rendering would be that Jesus braided a whip of cords.

Think about that, it takes time to braid a whip of cords. It is a deliberate act. And into that temple Jesus goes with his whip of cords. And he literally whips the place into shape. He overturns the tables and he sends the extortionists away.

He is critical here of the church leadership. He is not making suggestions. He is not making friends. He is on a mission. You see, I tell you what this is. This is an interruption to the accommodation of the institutional church.

Listen to that again: This is an interruption to the accommodation of the institutional church. It is what happened. They had accommodated.

The religious folk and the religious leaders of the day did not set out to domesticate what was going on there in the courtyard of the gentiles. Understand that it was necessary for the money changers to be there. You could not pay the temple with your Roman money—it was not acceptable currency. You could not show up for blood sacrifice with an animal that had any blemishes, the laws did not allow that. As such, spotless, clean, pure turtledoves and creatures had to be sold to those who would travel in to make their obligatory sacrifice.

It was not that such commerce should not be, but rather over time it got out of hand. The prices went up. The ratio of exchange become unduly harsh and expensive. Did they set out to cheat anyone or to make this into a profit making business—no, they accommodated. They lost sight of how it was supposed to be. They lost their way.

Talk about an interruption. It was—they had accommodated and they needed this interruption.

There is this little old story that the professor tells to his students. In telling the story he puts it in the form of a question. You are working away, doing exactly what you are supposed to be doing. You are under a deadline, and right in the middle of the important task that you are undertaking there is a knock at your door. An interruption.

And the professor asks the students, “What do you do?” And the professor answers the question, “My friends, life is the interruption.”

That is what the apostle Paul tells the people at Corinth. That the cross is an interruption to how they understand the world. They have

based their world on logic and reason and have raised oratory to a high standard.

And Paul interrupts their thinking, their wisdom: “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.”

The cross interrupts our accommodation.

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I’ve seen that happen in this church. We are doing that with Deep Shift. We have accommodated. That is one of the most important things we have learned about ourselves in this process, that we have accommodated. We never set out to make a church how we would want it to be, but after 40 years of ministry, and some of it, oh such great ministry—still there was this drift. There was this drift into doing things that felt comfortable. There was this drift into doing things in such a way that people were kept happy and church was to be a place that made them feel good. There was this drift into a way of being that did not rock the boat or overturn any tables.

We’ve been interrupted by the cross of Christ. In this Deep Shift we discerned what is God calling us to now. And it caused us to radically define our principles and purpose and shift our vision from looking in here at ourselves to looking out there at the world and our community to see who God is calling us to.

The tables have been turned. We cannot go back. We cannot return to a place where it is all about us. We are not going back to Egypt. We are not going to step up to this wall and be frightened away this time. We are going over. We are going over we are going through.

We can't help but go—there are hungry, hurting people out there in this community that need us. That is where God is moving is out there and we are going to join God in what God is ready to do. We are the hands and feet and physical body of God in this world.

Oh get me sisters, get me brothers, I know this is difficult—I know we are pushing hard on living into our new values and purpose. I know that I must come across to you as a bull in a china shop. I do have “bull” in my name after all. And I know that I can be a hard driving bull—but this “ain't no bull.”

It is not about filling the pews – it is about our being so on focus about changing lives and growing in God's love that there isn't anything else.

And so we come back to this table—and we get fueled up and fired up to get back out there to change lives. And we come back to this room to touch each other and hear the ancient words and remember just how odd our faith is so that we can grow in God's love.

It is odd to the world—that an instrument of death is where we look. We look there because we see pulled into that moment and pulled into that reality the truth the wounded Christ is the temple...that even death does not stop life that God has put in us.

Oh Silas—in a heartbeat that money was stolen and gone. And it would have crushed him to death. But just as his gold was gone, an orphaned child came to his doorstep. An interruption that changed his world.

This Jesus—he is that interruption. He calls us back. We accommodate without even noticing it. It is insipid. It happens without purpose. This Jesus—he calls us back—his cross calls us back to our purpose.

Will you be interrupted? Amen.