

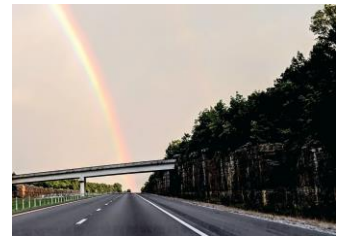
In the Name of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Intro

During these first few Sundays in Lent, we have been reviewing God's Covenants with the people of Israel.

Remember the Covenant was this: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

Two weeks ago we heard this Covenant made with NOAH and all creation as God promised never again to destroy the earth – and the sign of this Covenant was the RAINBOW.



Last week, we heard the Covenant renewed with ABRAHAM and his descendants: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

And ABRAHAM was promised that he would be the **Father of many nations** and the sign of this Covenant was the birth of ISAAC .

Today, we once again hear the Covenant being renewed with the People of Israel – this time with Moses: "I will be your God and you will be my people."

And the sign of this Covenant is the LAW – in the form of the **10 Commandments**.



I. The Law

A. The 10 Commandments was understood by the People of Israel to be the Word of God that described *their obligation* and their side of the Covenant.

1. Thus all the aspects of their relationship with God and with one another were understood within the context of this Covenant – and the Law.

2. But soon, 10 Commandments were not enough – with all the vagaries of life – all the “what ifs” – additional explanations were needed.

3. As we can see, whole books of the Bible – Leviticus and Numbers – were written to contain the laws and requirements that were developed.

4. Indeed, the first 5 Books of the Bible, are considered to be the Law – the Torah – the way to live out this Covenant.

B. Writing about the LAW and those who followed it – **Barbara Brown Taylor** – one of the great preachers of our day – says:

1. *“They had been following their rules for a long time – both the written Torah, given to them directly by Moses, and the oral Torah, developed by faithful rabbis over hundreds of years.*

2. *“Between the two sets of laws, every aspect of human life on earth was set under God’s will.*

3. *“There was nothing – not the least exchange between two people, not the simplest of meals – that was not covered by the law.*

4. *“Everything that could be done could be done in a holy way...”*

5. And so the Law grew from this simple “How to” manual of how to live out this relationship with God, into something much more complicated; until there wasn’t an act or event that wasn’t covered by the Law.

6. And it was this aspect of the Law that Jesus ran into full-tilt as he entered the Temple in our Gospel reading.

II. Cleansing the Temple

A. The story of the Cleansing of the Temple is found in all four Gospels.

1. In Matthew, Mark and Luke this event occurs right after Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

2. It is portrayed as Jesus' final challenge to the Religious Authorities leading the Chief Priest and others to begin to plot his death.

3. But this is John's Gospel we're reading, and this story is right at the beginning of the Gospel – right in chapter 2 – as Jesus' first public act in Judea – we have the Wedding at Cana and then this.

4. For John wants to show Jesus as the Messiah – the one sent from God – right from the beginning of his Gospel.

5. The Prophets said that the Messiah would come and purify the Temple – so John puts this story right up front to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, as Dr. William Barclay says, “*come to cleanse the worship of men and to open the door to God.*” (p.108)

B. So, when Jesus and His Disciples arrive there, they find a cacophony of sounds and activities.

1. There in the very Courts of the Temple were the tables of the **Money Changers**.

- Every male Jew over the age of 19 was to pay a Temple Tax, to support the work of the Temple, but the TAX could only be paid in **Temple Coins** with no graven image.

2. So as Pilgrims arrived at the Temple from all over the world, the **Money Changers** would change their money into **Temple Money**, so they could pay the **tax** and buy whatever else they needed.

3. This was fine, in fact it was allowed for in the Law, even charging a small fee was provided for in the Law, BUT these guys were taking it to the extreme, even charging for every coin they gave back in change.

4. And then there were the sellers of OXEN, SHEEP and DOVES – they too were making a hefty profit on the backs of the Pilgrims who had come to worship.

5. It might seem helpful to have animals for sacrifices available right there in the Temple, after all who wants to try and bring an ox or a ram with them on a lengthy journey, when you can pick one up right at the Temple.

6. But the problem was the **PRICE GOUGING** – a pair of Doves you could buy outside the Temple for 50 cents – inside the Temple would cost you \$7.50 or \$8.00.

7. Of course you could bring your own animals for sacrifice, but the Law said they must be perfect and unblemished, so there was a **Temple Inspector** and another fee – and you can imagine how many outside animals passed the Temple Inspectors.

8. Again, here is **bare-faced extortion** at the expense of the poor and humble Pilgrims who were practically blackmailed into paying exorbitant prices if they wished to make a sacrifice.

- All this done in the name of Religion.

9. And to make matters worse, all this was going on within the Temple Grounds, in what was known as the “Court of the Gentiles” – the only place a Non-Jew was allowed to go.

C. And then Jesus snapped.

- How is someone supposed to pray with all this racket going on?

1. He dumped over the tables of the Money Changers.

2. The Gospel says he made a **WHIP OF CHORDS** and drove the animals and their sellers out of the Temple saying,



Jesus Cleanses the Temple

- “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

3. Jesus was appalled at the travesty of what the temple had become.

4. In the prophetic vision of Isaiah the Temple was to be a house of prayer for all nations – but now it was nothing more than a mockery of the true spiritual worship that should be taking place there.

III. Cleansing OUR Temples

A. In cleansing the Temple and driving out the animals and sellers, Jesus was making a point – and that point is that the Temple was to be a place of reverence and worship.

1. With the bellowing of Oxen, the bleating of sheep, the cooing of Doves, the shouts of the Hucksters, the rattle of coins, the voices raised in bargaining disputes – HOW COULD ANYONE WORSHIP?

2. Jesus is striking a major blow for offering God true worship and not just going through the motions.

3. Worship without **reverence** – worship by just going through the motions is not worship at all – if anything, it is just the opposite and an **insult to God**.

4. In fact, rather than being helpful to worshipping God – all these things in the Temple were **DISTRACTIONS** to worshipping God.

- And so, Jesus drove the **DISTRACTIONS** out.

5. These were **DISTRACTIONS** that **prevented** prayer – that interfered with people’s relationship with God.

6. And so the question becomes, “What are **our** **DISTRACTIONS**?”

- What are the barriers to our own worship of God?

- What keeps you from prayer?

- What keeps you from a deeper relationship with God?

B. And that’s exactly where Lent can help us.

1. Lent gives us a wonderful opportunity to look at all our DISTRACTIONS and “**cleanse** our own Temples,” if you will.

2. Through Lent, we are encouraged to focus more on our own lives and OUR response to God.

3. That’s why during Lent we make some changes in our Liturgy, both to match the more reflective mood of the season, but also to keep us alert to what is going on.

4. A prime example of this is the Eucharistic Prayer we use during Lent from the supplemental book “Enriching our Worship.”

- The words of this prayer seem to sum up the very essence of the Lenten experience.

5. In this prayer, we hear again of God’s love for us, and our “*failure to honor God’s image in one another and in ourselves*” – and our ultimate rejection of God’s love.

6. But God didn’t give up on us – God tried and tried again – until finally, God sent Jesus who by, “*giving himself freely to death on the cross, triumphed over evil, opening the way of freedom and life.*”

7. As we pray this prayer this morning, let it wash over you – let it fill your heart and your head with love and gratitude for all God has done for us and continues to do for us.

8. And then offer back your worship – not a ROTE response – but praise to God from your inmost being – from your very core, as you strive to cleanse the Temple of your soul, and show forth your ZEAL for God.

9. For through our Lenten disciple of **Prayer, Fasting, and Works of Love**, we can “Cleanse the Temple” of OUR lives, that we may be truly focused on hearing God’s call and acting on it.

Let Us Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, you cleansed the Temple and made it once again a house of prayer for all nations: Help us, we pray, in our worship; that our hearts and minds may be truly set on you; and that all we do may be to your honor and glory; who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN.