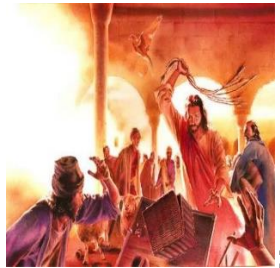


**Sermon for March 7, 2021** by Pastor Hanberry The Blessings of the Laws of God". (ser21-9) **TUCC – Third Sunday in Lent The Blessings of Lent Ex 20:1-17; John 2:13-22; Matt 5.6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.**

We've got two very different images before us this morning

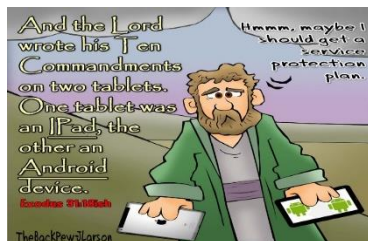


► An old tired man coming down from the mountain with two huge tablets of stone with 10 laws written on them. ► A wild and angry sounding Jesus with a whip he made of cords, chasing the animal-sacrifice-vendors and the money changers out of the temple.

Really 3 images: the 3<sup>rd</sup> one from the Beatitudes in Matt 5.6:



Cartoon last week with Moses struggling down the mtn. with tablets of stone and in the last frame, the captioned voice saying, you know you could have these in a PDF file. Ha. Or look at these cartoons:





Jesus is coming to church today. Rather than a hymnal or a Bible in his hand He has a whip. Good day for zoom; Jesus will have to go to each of our homes to clean up mess of the church.

Moses is coming to church today with tablets of stone on which are written great expectations for how we live with God and with each other. I'm not sure about this but things could get rough on this the third Sunday in Lent.



**Slide:** But contrary to all this, there is the possibility of a blessing of Lent to touch us all: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled. The more we hunger and thirst, the more open we become to Jesus' blessings. Stop sharing

In Chapter 19 of Exodus, the children of Israel, the people Moses has led out of Egyptian bondage, are tired after traveling a long journey, without much food or good logistics to support their travels. I bet Moses is tired too and wondering what in the world has God gotten him into after all. And so, Moses goes up on the mountain, perhaps to gain some perspective, to get some direction, to see the latest guru, to find some renewal of hope for what God has promised Moses and the people. And God speaks to Moses. And in God's still-speaking voice, God gives Moses a message for the people: <sup>4</sup>You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now

therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Out of this encounter with God, Moses receives the blessing of the Ten Commandments.

In this powerful event, “God offers the people a special identity that would grow out of living in accord with God’s covenant promises.” You see, these were more than just 10 laws to be obeyed; indeed, they were 10 visions, 10 promises of how God intended to shape their lives as they lived out God’s promises: 4 ways to love God and 6 ways to love each other.

The drama Jesus brings today is just as powerful: In Matthew, Mark and Luke, this story of Jesus cleansing the temple comes much later on---much nearer the last week of his earthly life. In Mark’s gospel Jesus goes to the temple on Monday of his last week.

But, John, in his gospel, places it here, early, in the second chapter. Jesus has just come from a wedding at Cana where he was the very picture of decorum and fun. He even helped his mother offer some new wine to the party. And after a few days with his family in Capernaum, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the Passover. And can you believe it? His first great public act of ministry is to take a whip in hand and clean house at the temple!

In the temple, the sacrifice vendors are selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and Jesus goes ballistic. The vendors are shocked. They sell the animals; they are given as sacrifice for forgiveness; the animals are re-sold again and again...Indulgences that keep on giving—money to the temple.

This was all very religious! The livestock are for the necessary, biblically prescribed temple sacrifice. You can’t make a sacrifice to God, can’t get your sins forgiven, can’t get right with God without such a sacrifice. (THE TEMPLE LEADERSHIP WAS ALREADY QUITE HAPPY WITH THEIR BELIEF THAT GOD PROVIDED FORGIVENESS THROUGH THE MEANS OF TEMPLE SACRIFICES---AND HERE WAS JESUS OFFERING FORGIVENESS APART FROM THE TEMPLE.) The rich folk bought oxen to sacrifice. The upper middle class bought sheep, and the poorer

folk bought doves. Take your sacrifice to the priest up at the altar and get right with God.

But “What if you didn’t have enough money to buy a dove?” you\_ask. Well, too bad. It takes money to run any organization, even a religious one; IT TAKES MONEY TO GET GOD’S FORGIVENESS.

So, Jesus being Jesus, he storms the church that Sunday: “stop making the Lord’s house a mega mall.”

Listen, my friends, in our gospel today, John tells us about a new temple, a new kind of altar, a new path to God, a path that doesn’t need all the trappings of the temple or church. But Jesus is talking about a different, new temple, a new way to God: A personal, loving, compassionate and passionate way---yes, Jesus Christ—the way, the truth and the life. That is God’s ultimate promise to us---a loving relationship with the living Jesus. That relationship is what gives us hope for the days ahead. Not this building, not even this altar.

Here, then, seven characteristics of the righteous, according to the Bible:

1. **They don’t take bribes** (Exodus 23:8), for a bribe blinds the wise, and perverts the words of the righteous. Instead, they judge without favoritism.
2. **They do not consult the wicked** (Proverbs 18:5; Psalm 1:5)
3. They may suffer hostility and hatred for doing right, but, ultimately, **God delivers them out of the trouble** (Psalm 34:19)
4. **Their earnings are honorable**, and they are contented with the little they may have compared to the riches of the corrupt (Psalm 37:16)
5. They are **kind and considerate** to the poor and, to animals (Proverbs 29:7; Pr 12:10)
6. **God’s favor is on them** (Psalm 34:15), and the Lord Himself directs their actions (Psalm 37:23)
7. **They leave a legacy;** will be remembered fondly (Psalm 112:6)

Those who hunger and thirst; those who suffer and plead for hope and a sense of peace will be filled. Jesus came to the temple to create a safe, loving space for those who plead for righteousness will be blessed. Moses gives us the blessings of God's laws...laws that bring aid to our suffering.

Diedra Kriewald, one of my seminary professors, wrote a book titled, "Hallelujah Anyway!" (Anne Lamont: H anyway) In this book on suffering and faith, Prof. Kriewald tells of her own grief and suffering after her new husband (25 yrs old at the time) and three youth from his church were killed in an awful auto accident in Mexico where they were helping to build a school. Diedra says, "she had a strong faith and a theological framework that allowed her to make sense of it all in her head and to go on with her life, but she continued to be plagued by panic attacks for more than a decade after the event." So much pain and grief stored in her body. **She writes this: "During a particularly stressful period, a friend's mother said to me, 'hang on to Jesus; Diedra, hang on to Jesus.'" Then Diedra asks, "how does one hang on to Jesus?"** She says it just didn't seem proper for a university-trained church historian, but somehow Jesus came storming into her life, almost pulling the rug out from under her intellectual and philosophical elitism – turning over the tables of her traditional way of relating to God and of dealing with her suffering. And when she stopped processing the idea of "hanging on to Jesus," through her great intellect, she hung on. She hung on to the promises of God that she had learned as a child, to the claims for healing and new life taught to her in the Old Testament stories of Moses and the New Testament stories of a loving and merciful Christ – a resurrected Christ.

Hanging on -- Holding fast to God's laws brings those laws off the tablets of stone and into our hearts and lives that we might have hope in the face of struggle. Hanging on -- Holding fast to Jesus whipping our temple lives into an honest shape frees us for a transforming walk with the living Christ. Both of these images free us to act in hope and freedom.

In her song, "Hold On," Twila Paris offers us the courage and hope:

***"We can hold on to sorrow,  
Hold on to pain,  
We can hold on to anger  
When there is nothing to be gained  
We can hold on to a thread  
As at the end of a rope.  
But if we hold on to Jesus,  
We are holding on to hope.  
We can hold on to money,  
Hold on to fame  
We can hold on to glory  
To the honor of a name  
We can hold on to a thread  
As at the end of a rope.  
But if we hold on to Jesus,  
We are holding on to hope.***

May it be so in your lives and in mine