

Proper 22 Year A  
The Church of the Redeemer, Greenville, SC  
October 4, 2020

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20   Psalm 19   Philippians 3:4b-14   Matthew 21:33-46

We have been worshipping outside since mid-July of this year. Next week, with proper protocols in place, we will step away from this worship space for a time. Although I hope that the stepping away is for a long time, we never quite know what lies ahead. In the meantime, a piece of asphalt, some trees, and a few sounds of nature, through the power of the Holy Spirit, have become holy ground. Even with traffic noise from streets below, God's presence is palpable. Week by week we have gathered and worshiped. In our outside worship space, has the worship inside of you changed? I hope that God has seeped, if not flooded, into your heart and your entire being, and that you have been transformed. Transformed. Into thinking that if this space can be filled with the presence of God, then maybe God can be ... anywhere. Everywhere. I hope that your imagination has taken you to envision worship at other times and places – apostles huddled in the dark night, wondering where their Lord had gone; Christians gathering in houses and courtyards, sharing Truth that will not be hidden, Love that cannot be stopped. Even in:

- The early church
- The “middle” church, modern church, postmodern church ... and beyond.

The past six months, and even now, is our Exodus. We remember our former ways (you know, in January), the food that we had, the routine of our day. Good or bad, we knew what life looked like. Now, we are uncertain. We wonder about getting back to “normal.” We are in a new place, we do not know when “normal” will get here, and actually what it might look like. We get fatigued and we grumble, stumble, and maybe lose heart for that which we have to do.

It is in this sort of time that God tells us how to get along and how to bring the kingdom of God into the world, wherever we may be. God says: before everything else “remember who I am.”

“<sup>2</sup>I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Then come rules for our actions, those things “outside” of ourselves, those parts of us that the world sees. Do not make idols; instead, look deep within yourselves to see the one, only real God. Look deep inside. Think hard and pray harder for God’s word. What is it every day that we give priority to ... that might keep us from seeing God?

Do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. The visible things that we do and say might actually damage our real (interior) selves. Who are we

cursing but the one who gives us life? Self-examination can help us realize what we say so that we do not damage our relationship with the One God in “thought, word, and deed.” We are proclaiming God’s kingdom not to some generic place but to our lives and communities. Why would we curse our creator?

Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy – holy comes from God, who transforms us in our very being. In these pandemic days that might in some ways seem all the same, take a Sabbath. Rest from worry, from sameness, from any anxiousness about tomorrow. One day a week, rest from “the usual,” and in so doing, honor God. We are on holy ground, right here; imagine taking a bit of that holiness with you and honoring it all day. Where will you place “holy” in your day once you leave here?

Each commandment has an outside: the rule, which is pointing to something inside of us. How many of us have committed murder? The “outside” rule seems easy. However, it is the outside action/word that points to what we hold deep within: murderous anger, smoldering grievances, gossip. Through those things we kill another’s spirit. We kill our integrity or the reputation of another.

I encourage you to spend some time with this passage. For each commandment, connect the outside rule with your interior character and choices. Let the

commandments no longer be an outdated list but a place of self-inquiry as we consider:

- How is my relationship with God?
- How are my relationships with others?

Discover the challenge and the grace in each commandment. Conclude this time with God by reading Psalm 19. Let the assurance of those words – that the commandments are sweet, like honey, more valuable than fine gold – rest within you.

Paul's letter describes what happened to him, how on the surface he was a zealous follower of Mosaic law while killing, persecuting Christians. Paul's transformation led him to a living relationship with God, to wholeness through God's grace. Paul does not nullify the law but places it in the context of God's grace. As Paul was transformed by Christ, so, too, can we be shaped by the Lord. We will never be perfect followers of Jesus Christ, but we can "press on" (as Paul writes), toward life in Christ.

Our relationship with the living Christ includes the caretaking of all creation.

Today we celebrate the feast of St. Francis, known for his great love and respect for animals and his love for trees, rivers, wild flowers and creation as a whole. St.

Francis and those who lived in community with him, his brothers, once moved out of their hovel so that a donkey could be housed there. St. Francis took his way of life to the extreme; we do not have to do that, but we join him in praising God for all the beautiful creatures God has made.

Maybe today we will know the love of God for us in the way our pets love us, or in the way we love our pets. The hum of a cat's purr, the slurp of a dog's kiss – maybe we will know the joy of God's creation in something simple today.

Life will not be normal next week simply because we will worship indoors. Life will be what it is in the present time, the only time that we have. I ask that we give thanks for our outdoor chapel, for the worship that has taken place here, for the grace of God and the relationships that we have renewed with one another, in ourselves, and in Christ. Continue to seek God in all times and places. Prayerfully consider God's grace in a parking lot, in every place we find ourselves, in ancient laws brought into relevance for today.

In all things, God's name be praised.

*“Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless this pet. By the power of your love, enable it to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen.”*