

The Vine at Home
Third Sunday in Lent – Year B
Sunday 7th March 2021

Call to worship

Some words from Michael Card's song 'God's Own Fool', to begin our worship:

"When we in our foolishness thought we were wise he played the fool and He opened our eyes... And so we follow God's own fool for only the foolish can tell – Believe the unbelievable and come be a fool as well."

Hymn: 317 STF – At the name of Jesus

Opening Prayers

Holy God, we worship you. *[Pause]*.

Lord of all time and space, as we come together in worship, we see the work of your hands revealed in the myriad of creation.

We see your mark on all that is around us, we hear your voice throughout all the earth, and feel your gracious touch.

You refresh our souls with justice and truth you bring joy into our hearts and inspire life and light, through your enduring and abiding presence.

Holy God, I worship you. *[Pause]*.

I open myself to you. Forgive my hidden faults, help me to be all you ask of me.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart, be pleasing in your sight,

Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.¹

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17 The Ten Commandments

20 Then God spoke all these words: **2** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; **3** you shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

4 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. **5** 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, **6** but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation^[b] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

¹ Opening prayers written by Patrick Stonehewer

7 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.

8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. **9** Six days you shall labour and do all your work. **10** 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. **11** 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.

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

13 You shall not murder.^[c] **14** You shall not commit adultery. **15** You shall not steal.

16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

17 You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.²

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - Christ the Power and Wisdom of God

18 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. **19** For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 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? **21** 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. **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, **23** but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.³

John 2:13-22 - Jesus Cleanses the Temple

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. **15** 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. **16** He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." **18** The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking of the temple of his

^{2,3,4}Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

body.²² 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.⁴

Reflections on the readings

If you are aged somewhere between 35 and 60 (or have children or parents who are) you may be familiar with the children's television programme 'Play School'. A favourite part of every episode was when the presenter would ask, 'Which window are we going to go through today?' and our little black and white television screens would show three huge windows, the Round Window, the Arched Window and the Square Window. At this point, eager children sitting cross-legged on the carpet at home would shout out their hope – before the presenter for the day made the choice and took us into an exciting story through one or other of these windows.

Sometimes looking at the Bible story reminds me of the Play School windows, especially when, as today, the passages chosen in the lectionary seem to be quite different shapes and give quite different ways of seeing God and our relationship with God.

The passage in Exodus in which Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai highlights the role of law in building our relationship with God. The Israelites, travelling as a migrant, nomadic community through wilderness terrain for forty years, needed some guidelines about how to live with each other and how to relate to God. The Ten Commandments are still well known – the fact of them anyway, if not the content – and have formed the basis for civil law as well as religious practice in many parts of the world for millennia. In a relatively short passage they cover much of human behaviour, from the call to put God first and foremost in our lives to a reminder not to look with longing on the brand-new hybrid car our neighbour has just purchased. In between they touch upon idolatry, blasphemy, work-life balance, family relationships, human rights and justice – quite an undertaking!

And wisdom is the shape of our next window onto God. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians wants them to understand that the human philosophies which were prized so highly by these early Greek Christians are not, ultimately, the way in which God is revealed or encountered. In fact, much of what God has done might appear to be folly compared with human wisdom.

Years ago, I found the perfect birthday card for my then-18-year-old son, Tim; amidst a cleverly drawn image were the words: 'Teenagers: Are you tired of being harassed by your stupid parents? Act now, move out, get a job and pay your own bills – now, while you still know everything.'

'Now, while you still know everything'... remember that phase of life? Or perhaps you haven't reached it yet? Thankfully it is usually short-lived and we spend the remainder of our lives realising how little we really know; how foolish we are. Yet, Paul seems to be saying, foolishness will bring us closer to the heart of God than wisdom can – certainly than what the world recognises as wisdom. He disparages all that his culture might value so highly and instead nails his colours to an absurd mast – the wooden cross of a criminal. Paul himself

realises that this will be ‘a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’. Surely it is foolishness to trust in such weakness, yet this is the road to which Paul points and to which Christ calls. In church life today, we often bewail our insignificance in society, our weakness, our lack of power or status. Perhaps these are the very qualities that will allow the power of Christ and the wisdom of God to be seen.

So, having glimpsed something of the gift of God’s law through the Square Window and the upside-down nature of Christ’s wisdom through the Round Window, come with me and gaze through the Arched Window to see some action; what is Jesus up to in today’s Gospel passage from John chapter 2.

Jesus is in the capital; a travelling preacher from the north hitting the big city, and not in the low season, but at the very height of the high season – it’s almost Passover time and any Jew from anywhere in the world who has the means and the freedom to travel will want to be in Jerusalem. It is crowded. That is still true today; in 2017, when we took travel around the world for granted, I was in Jerusalem at Passover, which was also Holy Week. It was absolutely packed; we were shoulder to shoulder in the narrow market streets and around the holy sites. A cacophony of noise at the Western Wall as 100,000 Jews gathered for the Priestly blessing and to add their prayers to the prayers of the centuries, lamenting the lost Temple.

In our reading, it was in that precise location, the courtyards of the Jerusalem temple, that Jesus met a spectacle which stirred him to violent anger. The very place where God was understood to dwell, where compassion was embodied, where justice was palpable, where worship was primary, in that very place God had been usurped by trading, self-interest, exploitation and commerce.

Where was the recognition of the holiness of God which Moses and the Israelites had experienced on the mountain? Where was the observation of the law of God with its clear directives to put God first and not to steal? Where was any understanding of the wisdom of God being something totally counter-cultural? All absent as the various traditions and expectations around this most holy season of Passover were twisted into a market-place of profit and consumerism. (We may not have to look too far back into last year’s diary to see something similar today!)

There is a warning here not to be sucked into the market economy of our society, but to be consumed instead with zeal for the dwelling place of God. Not a building now - for Jesus has promised that the Spirit of God lives within us – so our zeal, our enthusiasm, is for hosting and revealing the presence of God in our very selves, in our congregations, in our communities, in our world.

In these days of restricted travel and gathering, many of us have spent a great deal of time indoors, perhaps trying to find new views from our windows to stretch our horizons as much as we can. Let’s do that today, let’s be drawn to these different, inviting, elegant windows of our Bible passages to gaze and gaze and gaze again on the glory of God made known in transformative law, in a foolish kind of wisdom and in radical action.⁵

⁵ Reflection written by Jill Baker

What are you being called to?

A quote from the Franciscan writer, Richard Rohr: “Ultimately our vocation is to become ourselves, in the thousand thousand variants we are.” *[Pause]*

Two questions for you to consider:

- What do I think church is for?
- How would I like to be part of that?

Let us pray.

Creator God, we are all created uniquely, in the thousand, thousand variants that we are – I thank you for the gifts and graces you have given to me. As a community, we thank you for our variety and the different gifts and graces we have between us. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

God of compassion, we offer thanks for your goodness and for your blessings.

Seeing injustice, we pray

- for those crying in despair;
- for the continually hungry;
- for those ‘let down by the system’;
- for your guidance for those who hold authority.

Walking alongside, we pray

- with those enduring pain;
- with victims of violence;
- with people in dark places;
- help us to show empathy and understanding.

Offering hands of blessing, we pray

- over those in pain;
- over relationships at breaking point;
- over those who weep in grief; for courage to bless our homes and communities with your love.

Strengthen us to be who we are in you, and to show your light in all that we do so that your will be done, on earth as in heaven. We pray these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.⁶

Hymn: 547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship

Blessing

Holy God, you are mine and I am yours,
Each one of us is loved and accepted into your family, just as we are.
Remind us of this truth as we travel through the week ahead,
That we might be inspired and encouraged by your love for us. Amen.⁷

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Patrick Stonehewer

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

