

In the name of God, Creator, Incarnate, and Renewing Spirit.

There are so many ideas that we could focus on in our readings today. Among them, we have two iconic moments in our faith story: God giving Moses what we call the Ten Commandments; and Jesus, driving the animal sellers and money changers out of the Temple in Jerusalem.

Both of these moments, I think, are there to make us ask ourselves: what does it mean to worship God? What are the signs and the actions of living faithfully?

The Ten Commandments are sometimes mistaken for a list of things to do and to not do. But really, these pronouncements of God are a lens through which we understand how to *be*; how to be in relationship with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbor. The Ten Commandments give us direction on how to be in faithful community.

God comes first. The commandments given to Moses begin with God declaring who God is, and how we recognize the God who has chosen us to be in relationship. God is the God of liberation; God frees creation from

oppression and exploitation; from the destruction of greed that would build wealth and privilege for a few on the backs of many. God is the one who hears the cry of the broken and the brokenhearted and acts, through us, to deliver all who are in bondage.

The commandments tell us who God is not; God is not the one who picks our side, God is not the one who looks out for our interests first over and against everyone else. That false god is a creation of our ego; an image we make of our most ungenerous selves; and the One true God tells us that no life is to be found worshipping that.

God warns us to shun idols; for us today, that probably does not mean figures carved out of stone or wood, or cast in metal. I think today, our idols are the habits we are encouraged to take on, or the things we are targeted to consume to give us false senses of control, or certainty in a life that never promises that. These kinds of idols turn us away from relationship with God that grows and deepens through adversity, a relationship that asks us to trust in God's ultimate loving care and goodness even when we cannot seem to see or feel it. Idols offer to numb us or shield us from the changes and chances of our life; God invites us to

become more the likeness of God's children as we were created and find life abundant.

God makes it clear that we never engage in our spiritual life in isolation; every choice we make, whether to worship God or turn to idols will have an effect on those around us and those who come after us. So then the commandments turn from our individual relationship with God to Godly relationship in community. Do not make wrongful use of God's name; in other words, don't try to justify actions that you make for your own selfish purposes by declaring that they are in accord with the will of God. And to paraphrase our Presiding Bishop, if what we do is not about radical love, incarnational welcome, and unimaginable grace, mercy and compassion, then it is not about God. Always test what you do and say to see if it is of God, or if it is from one of those lesser idols we create in the image of our own ego.

Then, strive to make your community, your society, one where no one is exploited or exhausted by work that does not provide enough for true rest. Respect and honor those who have built good things before you, and seek to become one worthy to be respected and honored by those who come

after you. Do not take away anyone's life, whether by spiritual, emotional, economic, or physical violence. Do not behave in ways that are destructive to your relationship with others in your community, or with God. And do not value yourself or others by what things you think you can acquire or possess.

That is a lot more than a checklist of "dos" and "do nots". It is a monumental shift in how we relate to God and to our neighbor; it gives us standards of humility and generosity, and an awareness of our interdependence against which to measure our actions. And that is where we meet Jesus in today's Gospel.

Jesus driving out the animal sellers and the money changers from the Temple is an episode that occurs in all four Gospels. On the surface, it may seem that Jesus does not want to see the profane in a place that is meant to be holy. But these merchants were actually providing a service that was necessary to a certain kind of relationship with God; one that was transactional: a checklist of things you could do without necessarily having a change of heart. These were sacrifices and worship that could be done without that shift in relationship with God and neighbor demanded in

Exodus. People came from near and far to sacrifice or pay their tax at the Temple; the only money acceptable was the Jewish shekel that did not have a “graven image” on it, such as the head of Caesar, which would seem to be a violation of the very commandment we just read. So, when pilgrims came to Jerusalem, they changed their Roman coins for the shekel. And if they needed to sacrifice and came from far away and were not able to drive their own cattle across miles of desert or mountains, or they couldn’t afford more than two doves, they purchased them from the animal sellers when they arrived. The money changers and the animal sellers supported worshipers at the Temple, but it was worship as a transaction, not about being in transformational relationship with God. And Jesus, who was zealous to bring God’s children back into fruitful relationship with God and neighbor, wanted to drive this unclean spirit of transaction out of God’s house, so that a clean spirit of relationship of the heart, a transformational relationship that called God Abba, Amma, and called neighbor sister, brother, and sibling could take its place. Jesus wanted even the foundations of this house of heartless transaction to be torn down, so that a house of intimate Spirit could be built up instead.

God has been calling us into closeness, into loving relationship for as long as we have existed as God's creation. When the word spoken to Moses brought us as close as it could, God became incarnate, living Word to bring us even closer. As we receive God's longing for us as the unfathomable grace that it is, God asks us to turn to one another and forge relationships rooted and centered in God through the practices of humility and generosity with that same longing for loving, liberating, and life-giving relationship that God has for us. May it be so. Amen.