



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey
A Service for Sunday 7 March 2021 – The Third Sunday of Lent
'Living life and faith, the right way up'
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Old Testament Bible Reading: Exodus 20: 1-17

The Ten Commandments

Reflection: Part 1

The greasy pole: The thought of committing murder is abhorrent to us. In my reflections on the Ten Commandments, however, I realised that there are more ways of 'murdering' the fulness of life out of someone than striking them down. The almost imperceptible gestures that disrespect a person's physical appearance, spiritual beliefs or, ignoring their lack of basic means can, with the passage of time, become greater abuses causing a slide ever further down the moral greasy pole of life. I imagine that I am not alone in making this admission, that there have been multiple times that I have not loved God with my whole heart and my neighbour as myself, thereby failing to uphold the other commandments. The thing is trying to adhere scrupulously to those 10 unequivocal benchmarks of 'You shall not ...' is a tall order, human as we are. Is there a way to make adherence a whole lot easier?

The fruit basket: I find it more helpful to turn things round from the 'You shall not' to 'Do enjoy ...'. How is this possible? I think St Paul realised that his early spiritual life was so full of 'You shall nots' that it constrained his faith. After his encounter with Jesus turning Paul's focus on faith the right side up, it resulted in his words bursting into life in all its fullness. Take, for instance, when he said '... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. There is no law against such things.' (*Galatians 5: 22-23*). Living the Ten Commandments seems a whole lot more achievable fortified with our five-a-day portions from the spiritual fruit basket.

Psalm: 19: 7-end

The perfection of God's Law

Reflection: Part 2

No holds barred: The outstanding feature of psalms is their unvarnished honesty. There is a psalm to reflect every way we might be feeling on any particular day. There are those full of joy and praise of God and his creation. Other psalms are full of raw emotion, 'Where are you God in all my grief and misery? Do you really care? Are you really there?' There are yet others that reflect the wisdom gleaned from life's experiences and faithful godly devotion, which helps to turn life the right way up.

It's good to talk: What psalms all have in common is that they never cease to communicate directly with God irrespective of whether that is in praise, a lament or, a rant. Psalm 19 is a meditation on

God's law and the benefits gleaned from living honestly yet humbly within it. The essence of it can be summed up in the first and last lines, 'The law of the LORD is perfect ... O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.'

New Testament Reading: 2: 13-22

The cleansing of the temple

Reflection: Part 3

Righteous anger: In Tim's reflections last week he commented that sometimes it's right to be angry; today, Jesus is certainly angry. What has caused him to enact the words from scripture, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'? Zeal can mean many things: passion, fire, as well as love but in the minds of the religious leaders it has generated suspicion, even, outrage. Jesus has come to the most sacred place of worship of God and instead of finding it a place that enables all people to draw close to him for strength and consolation, institutional stumbling blocks have been put in their way.

Overturning misconceptions: To approach God within the sanctity of the inner temple, the people are made to run the gauntlet of the institutional market place. They are required to purchase, at exorbitant prices, an offering for sacrifice in accordance with their means and purpose. For some, the cost is beyond their means and seemingly puts the grace and mercies of God beyond their reach. No wonder the disciples had come to believe that only the rich and studious could achieve redemption. There is no basket of fruits of the Spirit to nurture people here. With his dramatic cleansing of the temple Jesus seeks to rid religion of institutional oppression, which has smothered the purpose of enabling a relationship with God. He seeks to turn the focus of worship the right way up freeing people to approach God at anytime, anyplace, anywhere.

The ultimate right way up: Jesus realises that ultimately only the destruction of the institutionalised religion practised at the temple will help to free peoples' rigidly held beliefs. He strives to open their eyes to a bigger temple that encompasses all people, the temple of his body or, as we usually call it 'the Body of Christ', of which all can become members freely. The cost of the offering of sacrifice for the redemption of all people will be his: his life for ours: to echo the psalm, 'O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.'

If Jesus called on us today, which way up would he find us living our life and faith?

Amen.