

# A New Obedience

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.  
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*  
(John 13:34)



## Lenten Devotions

Part 1  
(March 2-25, 2022)

Pastor Tom Maehl  
First Lutheran Church, Waltham, MA

## Introduction

Lent comes with its call to turn with more intention toward God, seeking to follow more closely the way of Jesus (which ultimately is the way of love). These Lenten Devotions are focused on words of Moses from Deuteronomy laid side-by-side with words from the Gospel of Luke.

**A word about Moses:** Moses is the giver of the law on Mount Sinai. Part 1 of these devotions focus on the words of Moses as he prepares to give the ten commandments (Deuteronomy chapter 4). Part 2 focuses on the ten commandments, the center of the law (Deuteronomy chapter 5). Parts 3 and 4 (in a 2<sup>nd</sup> volume) focus on further implications for the community.

**A word about Jesus:** Jesus is the fulfillment of the law; and through his death and resurrection, we are freed from the varied demands of the law given through Moses. As followers of Jesus, we have but one commandment, to love. Love is our guide. As Moses called the Israelites to devotion through the following of specific commandments, now Jesus calls us to devotion through following where love leads. A central motivation for daily devotions is to aid in discerning where love is calling us now.

**A word about the structure:** Each day there is a reading from Deuteronomy followed by some background on the passage. Then words from Luke come next. Following that there is an invitation to contemplation and a concluding prayer. Note that the readings from Deuteronomy are in chronological order, whereas the passages from Luke are mostly selected to compliment the theme of the day. There is, however, one exception; in part 1 the words of Moses are laid side-by-side with words and events of Jesus from the night of his last supper, betrayal, and arrest.

**A word about contemplation:** Contemplation is not the same as meditation (mediation can be quite helpful, it's simply not the same). Whereas in mediation one seeks to empty the mind, in contemplation one seeks to focus the mind. Each day there are several questions offered to guide one's focus. You are invited to quietly sit for 2-5 minutes with one or more of the questions. Pick the one or ones that most resonate or create one of your own. Pay attention to the people who come to mind, perhaps jot down particular insights.

**Weekdays, Sunday, and Saturday:** Devotions are included for weekdays only. Sundays are left for attending to scripture in worship. Saturday is left as a little sabbath for putting this aside, or catching up if you've fallen behind, or looking back so as to think more deeply about some question or insight that grabbed you during the week.

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I pray that as you engage in the practice of contemplation on scripture, you might be drawn closer to the God who is Love, and who is with you always.

Blessed Lent, Pastor Maehl

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## Ash Wednesday, Devotion

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:1-2

*So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. <sup>2</sup>You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you.*

**Background:** Moses calls the Israelites to maintain devotion to God through the rigorous obedience of commandments, statutes, and ordinances; these contain myriad laws about behavior, dress, diet, sacrifice, and ritual. We are not Israelites, however, and these laws do not apply to us. St. Paul writes, *“If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law,”*<sup>1</sup> and Paul will repeatedly insist that in Christ Jesus we have been freed from all such demands. Yet we too are called to devotion; a devotion centered not on law but on our relationship with Jesus Christ. We are called to be devoted to God through our following of Jesus; and like people of old, temptations and distractions may lure us away.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:1-6

*Now the festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, was near. <sup>2</sup>The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to put Jesus to death, for they were afraid of the people. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was one of the twelve; <sup>4</sup>he went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers of the temple police about how he might betray him to them. <sup>5</sup>They were greatly pleased and agreed to give him money. <sup>6</sup>So he consented and began to look for an opportunity to betray him to them when no crowd was present.*

**For Contemplation:** Satan, also known as ‘the deceiver’, appears. Judas succumbs to temptation and what was once devotion to Jesus now turns into betrayal. We are a mixture of sinner and saint; capable of great good; yet tending to get caught up in tangled webs spun from anxiety, selfishness, and unbelief. Therefore, we are a mixture of devotion and betrayal.

- How is your devotion to God currently demonstrated?
- How does ‘the deceiver’ most often tempt you to betray Jesus?
- What one thing might the Spirit be calling you to take on or let go of this Lent?

**Prayer:** Dear God, forgive my failings and my betrayals. Help me to grow deeper in my devotion to you. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 5:18

## Thursday after Ash Wednesday, Obedience

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:5-7

*See, just as the LORD my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. <sup>6</sup>You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!' <sup>7</sup>For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?*

**Background:** Moses is rearticulating his call to obedience to the to the statutes, ordinances, and commandments. We too are called to obedience, yet in a different way. *St. Paul writes, "If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'<sup>2</sup> Paul insists that we are called to an obedience that is lived out not through attention to rules, but rather through attention to people; that is through attention to the needs of our neighbor. This, however, raises questions, "Which neighbor?" and "What precisely am I supposed to do?" The answers to these questions are unique to each person and are revealed by the Holy Spirit as we live out our daily life.*

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:7-13

*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. <sup>8</sup>So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' <sup>9</sup>They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' <sup>10</sup>'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters <sup>11</sup>and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' " <sup>12</sup>He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' <sup>13</sup>So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.*

**For Contemplation:** In this passage. Peter and John are given a specific task by Jesus, one that will not ever be given to anyone else. They are not told why; they are simply called to do it. We too are given unique tasks by the risen Christ, they come hidden in the needs of family and friends, acquaintances, and strangers. Part of our faith journeys is to continually discern which needs Christ intends to address through us, and which may be left for Christ to address through someone else.

- When have you addressed the need of another recently?
- When have you passed on addressing the need of another?
- Where might God have been in these experiences?

**Prayer:** Dear God, forgive me for the times I have taken on too little or too much. Help me to discern which needs of the world you would have me address. Then empower me to act. Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> Galatians 5:13-14

## Friday after Ash Wednesday, Remembrance

### First Reading: Deuteronomy 4:9-10

*But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—<sup>10</sup>how you once stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, when the LORD said to me, 'Assemble the people for me, and I will let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me as long as they live on the earth, and may teach their children to do so.'*

**Background:** At various times, Moses calls the Israelites to remember the central stories of their faith. Here, he is instructing that they perpetually remember the giving of the law on Mt. Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai). Within Judaism, this event is celebrated to this day on the holiday called Shavuot. We too are called to remember the central stories of our faith, the most central being the death and resurrection of Jesus.

### Gospel Reading: Luke 22:14-20

*When the hour came, he [Jesus] took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup>He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; <sup>16</sup>for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' <sup>17</sup>Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; <sup>18</sup>for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' <sup>19</sup>Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' <sup>20</sup>And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'*

**For Contemplation:** Each time we celebrate Holy Communion we remember this part of our faith story. In doing so, we remember that what is decisive for our salvation is not what we do, but what God has done through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is meant to free us **from** any dread of punishment, and free us **from** anxiously trying to prove ourselves worthy of God's love through rigorous observance of rules. This is also meant to free us **for** reengaging in our basic work of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

- What of the Holy Communion Ritual do you find most meaningful?
- As you practice your faith, where do you experience being free **from** something?
- As you practice your faith, where do you experience the call to be free **for** something?

**Prayer:** Thank you O God for your promise that in Christ Jesus nothing will ever separate us from your love. Help me to bear the burdens of this day; and trusting you are with me, help me to more deeply embrace the freedom to love you offer in Christ. Amen.

## Monday after the First Sunday in Lent, Resisting temptation

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:15-19

*Since you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire, take care and watch yourselves closely, <sup>16</sup>so that you do not act corruptly by making an idol for yourselves, in the form of any figure—the likeness of male or female, <sup>17</sup>the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, <sup>18</sup>the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. <sup>19</sup>And when you look up to the heavens and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, do not be led astray and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples everywhere under heaven.*

**Background:** The ongoing temptation for the Israelites was to embrace the gods of their neighboring tribes, represented by idols. Why would they be tempted to do this? Because life is hard. Maybe the God of Israel really isn't strong enough or caring enough to help in time of famine; perhaps a little altar to the local fertility god just might help. There were gods to turn to for fevers, storms, love, war, and the list goes on and on. Why not hedge your bets and mix in a little of those gods along with some devotion to Yahweh? Here are two reasons why not. First, it is disloyal to the one true God. Second, ultimately the foreign gods cannot produce. In the end, what we long for is abundant life; and the only true source for this is the one true God.

### **Gospel reading:** Luke 22:24-27

*A dispute also arose among them [the disciples] as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. <sup>25</sup>But he [Jesus] said to them, 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. <sup>26</sup>But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. <sup>27</sup>For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.*

**For Contemplation:** The ancient world is long gone, and we are no longer tempted by figurines representing foreign gods; yet we have temptations of our own. What will produce the kind of life we modern people long for? More money or power? What about greater public image, more recognition? The setting for this passage is the last supper. Jesus is about to be arrested, tried, and crucified; yet sadly, the disciples are still focused on their image and reputation. "Resist this temptation," Jesus urges them, "Keep your focus on your neighbor's needs, keep serving; God sees all, let that be recognition enough."

- As you think about your future, what are you trusting God to provide?
- What do you fear God might not be strong enough or caring enough to provide?
- How does a desire for recognition play into this?

**Prayer:** Forgive me God for my lack of trust. Help me to resist the temptations that might pull me away from the life you desire for me. Strengthen me to serve. Amen.

## Tuesday after the First Sunday in Lent, Grounded in Hope

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:21-23

*The LORD was angry with me because of you, and he vowed that I should not cross the Jordan and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving for your possession. <sup>22</sup>For I am going to die in this land without crossing over the Jordan, but you are going to cross over to take possession of that good land. <sup>23</sup>So be careful not to forget the covenant that the LORD your God made with you, and not to make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you.*

**Background:** Moses had a deep and intense relationship with God. There were times when Moses complained and argued with God. There were times when Moses suffered due to the tasks that God had set before him; there was, after all, enormous responsibility placed on his shoulders. As it turned out, Moses did not live long enough to enjoy the fruits the promised land himself, but those who came after him did so with rejoicing. They were benefiting from the faith and determination of their ancestor Moses. We too benefit from the faith and determination of our ancestors.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:28-30

*'You are those who have stood by me in my trials; <sup>29</sup>and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, <sup>30</sup>so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*

**For Contemplation:** The original disciples were there with Jesus on the night of his betrayal; they were also there when he appeared after the resurrection. They would be the ones upon whose shoulders was placed the responsibility of starting this new movement that came to be called Christianity. We stand on their shoulders, and the shoulders of many others too. There are those who resisted and reformed when the Church went astray. There are those who made great sacrifices to construct the church buildings in which we worship. There are those who passed on the faith to us; this faith that assures us that we too shall eat and drink at Christ's table.

- Upon whose shoulders do you stand? That is, who has given or sacrificed something so that the faith might be passed on to you?
- In what way or ways do you give or sacrifice so that the faith might be passed on to those who are coming after you?
- When have you experienced a foretaste of that end time feast, when we eat and drink with the resurrected Jesus Christ?

**Prayer:** Thank you God, for those who have served and sacrificed for me, and others like me. Help me to be a good ancestor. Keep me grounded in the hope that your kingdom is coming. Amen.

## Wednesday after the First Sunday in Lent, Repentance

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:25-31

*When you have had children and children's children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoking him to anger, <sup>26</sup>I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are crossing the Jordan to occupy; you will not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. <sup>27</sup>The LORD will scatter you among the peoples; only a few of you will be left among the nations where the LORD will lead you. <sup>28</sup>There you will serve other gods made by human hands, objects of wood and stone that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell. <sup>29</sup>From there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find him if you search after him with all your heart and soul. <sup>30</sup>In your distress, when all these things have happened to you in time to come, you will return to the LORD your God and heed him. <sup>31</sup>Because the LORD your God is a merciful God, he will neither abandon you nor destroy you; he will not forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them.*

**Background:** This passage reveals a basic trait of human nature. When things are tough, we tend to turn to God for help. Then, after help comes and we are at peace, we tend to forget God. This is what happened with the ancient Israelites. Time and again they would turn to God for help, receive it; but then soon after, turn away. Due to their turning away, God would punish them in ways that brought suffering; then once again they would cry out for help. Over and over.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:31-34

*'Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, <sup>32</sup>but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.'* <sup>33</sup>*And he said to him, 'Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!'* <sup>34</sup>*Jesus said, 'I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.'*

**For Contemplation:** Simon Peter is so willing, 'Go ahead Jesus, place hard demands upon me.' But when the hard demand comes later that same night, the demand to simply acknowledge his relationship with Jesus in a moment when that is dangerous, Peter turns away; later he will repent. We too turn away, yet instead of punishment by God (for a failure to perfectly love God and our neighbor as our self), we receive forgiveness in Jesus Christ and an invitation to start over, again and again. Every day on our journey of faith is an opportunity for a new start!

- When like Peter have you been afraid to acknowledge your faith before others?
- Moses declares that God is Merciful. How has God been merciful to you?
- With every day comes the opportunity for a new start. What do you ask of God for your journey today?

**Prayer:** Forgive me, O God, for the times when I have missed the mark and fallen short. Thank you for your continued mercy, forgiveness, and love of me. Give me an ample measure of your Spirit that I might continue to grow in faith, hope, and love. Amen.

## Thursday after the First Sunday in Lent, Discernment

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:37b-39

*The LORD brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, <sup>38</sup>driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, giving you their land for a possession, as it is still today. <sup>39</sup>So acknowledge today and take to heart that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. <sup>40</sup>Keep his statutes and his commandments, which I am commanding you today for your own well-being and that of your descendants after you, so that you may long remain in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time.*

**Background:** Long before, God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would be the ancestors of a great nation and that their descendants would be given a particular land. Here, Moses is reminding the people that God took this promised land from others in order to give it to them. When Europeans began settling the Americas, they adopted this story as their own. As indigenous people began dying from smallpox and other diseases, they assumed God was clearing out the other nations for them. Now, five hundred years later, we are being called to rethink that assumption. This is the challenge of reading Deuteronomy. There are rules and promises. Which ones belong only to the Jewish people? Which ones become ours too through baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ? This takes discernment in community.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:39-46

*He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. <sup>40</sup>When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' <sup>41</sup>Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, <sup>42</sup>'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' [[ <sup>43</sup>Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. <sup>44</sup>In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] <sup>45</sup>When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, <sup>46</sup>and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'*

**For Contemplation:** When Jesus faces this great suffering, his disciples are asleep. Elsewhere, Jesus instructs them that in days to come he will appear hidden in the suffering of others (those who are hungry, thirsty, a stranger, etc.).<sup>3</sup> Others suffer when Christians are asleep, and also when Christians wrongly discern which part of Israel's story belongs to them.

- Consider the land you occupy and your possessions. What do you sense God has been delighted to give you? What perhaps not?
- Consider our nation, with its core values and its long history. What do you sense pleases God? What perhaps not?
- Where might God be calling you to wake from sleep?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, rouse me from sleep, help me to play my part in a faith community that is called to discern. May we be of use to you in your work of deliverance. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 25:35-36

## Friday after the First Sunday in Lent, No vengeance

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 4:41-43

*Then Moses set apart on the east side of the Jordan three cities <sup>42</sup>to which a homicide could flee, someone who unintentionally kills another person, the two not having been at enmity before; the homicide could flee to one of these cities and live: <sup>43</sup>Bezer in the wilderness on the tableland belonging to the Reubenites, Ramoth in Gilead belonging to the Gadites, and Golan in Bashan belonging to the Manassites.*

**Background:** Violence is part of the human story. Sometimes it's intended, sometimes its accidental. In Moses's day, intended killing (murder) was often punishable by death. In this passage Moses is setting apart three cities for those who unintentionally kill another. This would serve to protect the accidental killer from the revenge that might be delivered by offended family members of the deceased. This would also protect those same family members, who in rage might lash out with vengeance and break God's commandment against murder.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 22:47-51

*While he [Jesus] was still speaking, suddenly a crowd came, and the one called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He approached Jesus to kiss him; <sup>48</sup>but Jesus said to him, 'Judas, is it with a kiss that you are betraying the Son of Man?' <sup>49</sup>When those who were around him saw what was coming, they asked, 'Lord, should we strike with the sword?' <sup>50</sup>Then one of them struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his right ear. <sup>51</sup>But Jesus said, 'No more of this!' And he touched his ear and healed him.*

**For Contemplation:** In this scene Jesus is betrayed by one of his closest friends. Injustice and hurt can come from anywhere, but betrayal can only come from those who are intimately close. Along with Judas, there are men who have come to arrest Jesus. The other disciples immediately recognize the injustice in this and are ready to fight back, one even lashes out with a sword. Jesus, however, will have nothing to do with vengeance. "No more of this!" he cries. Then he reaches out to heal his enemy's ear.

- When have you been on the receiving end of a betrayal?
- When have you been on the giving end of a betrayal?
- Where might God be calling you to forgiveness and healing?

**Prayer:** Dear God, in Christ you draw intimately close to me; yet in my failure to trust you and forgive others as I ought, I betray you. Thank you for your forgiveness and love of me. Help me in my dealings with others to give what I daily receive from you. Amen.

## Monday after the Second Sunday in Lent, No other gods

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:1-2,6-7

*Moses convened all Israel, and said to them: Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances that I am addressing to you today; you shall learn them and observe them diligently. <sup>2</sup>The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. And he said: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>7</sup>you shall have no other gods before me.*

**Background:** In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote about this 1<sup>st</sup> commandment that, “We should fear, love, and trust God above all things.” Luther would say that whatever you fear the most, love the most, trust the most is your god. That could be the one true God, or it could be money, control, image, achievement, your child’s success, or something else. There are so many options. If we are going to approach observing this commandment, we are going to need help. Let us pray for God’s help!

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 11:1-4

*He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.’ <sup>2</sup>He said to them, ‘When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial.’*

**For Contemplation:** Jesus instructs his followers how to pray. It is a prayer that helps us keep God and neighbor central. The prayer goes like this, “Father, hallowed be your name, not mine. Your kingdom come, not mine. Give not just me, but all of us what we truly need. Forgive all of us our sins, just like I myself have been forgiving others who are in any way indebted to me; (and if I haven’t been doing so, I better get on that before continuing with this prayer). Finally, life is hard, and challenges come. Save me O God from a trail where I might be judged a failure. So too, save me O God from the kind of life trials that might damage my soul. Amen.

- What do you fear the most?
- What do you love the most?
- What do you trust the most?

**Prayer:** “Lord command what you will and grant what you command.”<sup>4</sup> That is to say, give us such an ample measure of your Holy Spirit that we may fulfill your command to love. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup> St. Augustine

## Tuesday after the Second Sunday in Lent, No idolatry

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:8-10

*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. <sup>9</sup>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 fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

**Background:** Here Moses teaches that there are consequences for breaking the commandments. If a parent turns to false gods, the consequences will ripple down through the children, grandchildren, and perhaps great grandchildren. This goes for all the commandments. When parents lie or cheat, when there is domestic violence or an adulterous affair, the children are affected and this in turn influences their own parenting. The consequences are real; but then so too is God's grace, to the thousandth generation. This is figurative speech, but how delightful to embrace it as literal. Imagine, if a generation is 25 years, that means that the faithfulness to God of one ancestor 2,500 years ago still has ripple effects today. Yes, there are consequences to sin, but God's grace will win out!

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 11:9-13

*'So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'*

**For Contemplation:** Jesus is addressing these words to sinful people, "You who are evil." These are people who make mistakes, whose devotion to God waxes and wanes, and whose behavior at times negatively affects the next generation. They are our ancestors; and they are us. We are no longer tempted to worship figurines, but we have our own forms of idolatry. For example, we may be tempted by modernism to believe that we can transcend sin (and therefore a true need for God) by approaching an exemplary life of proficiency, accomplishment, and responsibility. Let us call this the idol of the perfectly balanced life. This is affecting our children! How wonderful that Jesus welcomes people who fall far short of perfection, calling us to keep praying to God who is merciful and forgiving, and whose transforming grace ripples down through generations.

- How have you been affected by the faithfulness and failures of your parents and grandparents?
- How have you experienced God's grace overcoming the failures of your ancestors?
- And your own?

**Prayer:** Imagine yourself in this moment not as a competent adult but as a child before God. What do you, beloved child, ask of God your parent?

## Wednesday after the Second Sunday in Lent, Right use of God's name

**First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:11

*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.*

**Background:** Moses first encountered God speaking from a burning bush. At one point in the conversation, Moses asked God to reveal God's name. This would have made logical sense to ask, for the gods of Egypt all had names and their names somehow were tied to their particular area of oversight: Osiris (god of the underworld), Isis (feminine god of magic), Ra (god of the sun), etc. God replied to Moses saying, "My name is Yahweh, meaning 'I am who I am,' or 'I will be whom I will be'." In other words, "You cannot pin me down." This name became so sacred to the Israelites that they were forbidden to speak it; after all, if you do not speak it, you are certain not to misuse it. To this day, when Jewish people read scripture aloud, whenever God's name appears (written as YHWH without any vowels), the reader replaces it with the word 'Adonai' meaning Lord. Out of respect for this tradition, wherever this name YHWH appears in original Hebrew, the translators of our bibles write 'LORD' (all uppercase).

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 11:14-15

*Now he [Jesus] was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. <sup>15</sup>But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.'*

**For Contemplation:** In Christ we are free from the demands of the Mosaic law. Thus, we can speak the name that God gave from the burning bush, 'Yahweh'. So too, we are free to move on from worry about swearing to focus on the things that weigh heavily on God's heart like injustice. Turning to this story of Jesus we find revealed the most critical way in which God's name is misused. That is, to declare what is evil to be the will of God; and likewise, to declare what is fact the will of God to be evil. In the passage above Jesus mercifully heals a person who has been suffering; his detractors, however, declare his action to be evil. Later, the crucifixion of Jesus will be declared by some as a rightful way to keep the peace.

- Healing, feeding, housing, and economic relief for the poor are revealed to be the will of God.<sup>5</sup> Where do you see evidence of good being named as evil?
- Likewise, where do you see evil being named as God blessed?
- How does it make you feel to hear God say, "I am who I am and I will be whom I will be, you can't pin me down" (Anxious, curious, hopeful, other)?

**Prayer:** Give me an ample measure your Spirit, O God, so that I might distinguish between good and evil. Then give me the strength and courage to speak and act for the good. In Jesus name. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Luke 4:18-19

## Thursday after the Second Sunday in Lent, Keep Sabbath

### First Reading: Deuteronomy 5:12-15

*Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup>For six days you shall labor and do all your work. <sup>14</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.*

**Background:** The observance of this commandment, more than perhaps anything else, has identified the Jewish people throughout history. It has been said somewhere, “It’s not that the Jews keep sabbath, it is that sabbath keeps the Jews.” Note that the observance of this commandment is not just an act of obedience, it is also an act of faith. It takes faith to turn over one’s cares for a whole day, trusting that God will hold them. Likewise, it takes faith to lay aside productivity for twenty-four hours, trusting that not only is there in fact enough for today, but also there shall also be enough for tomorrow for God has promised to provide.

### Gospel Reading: Luke 14:1-6

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. <sup>2</sup>Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. <sup>3</sup>And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, ‘Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?’ <sup>4</sup>But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. <sup>5</sup>Then he said to them, ‘If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?’ <sup>6</sup>And they could not reply to this.*

**For Contemplation:** In Christ, we are free from the demands of the Jewish law, this includes refraining from all work on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the week, sundown Friday through sundown Saturday. However, we are not free from the natural law that God has woven into creation. We know that without rest, creativity dries up and we wither. We know that without regular patterns for worship and prayer, we will drift from God. We too are called to practice times of ceasing and must discern how to build times of sabbath into our lives. There is freedom in this, our sabbath patterns don’t need to match our neighbor’s; and, of course, there will come times when the needs of a neighbor will call for the rearranging of whatever sabbath patterns we have chosen.

- Where do you find rest for your body?
- Where do you find rest for your soul?
- What is tempting you to neglect sabbath?

**Prayer:** O God, thank you for gift of my body, my spirit, my life. Teach me how to appropriately honor this gift with both action and sabbath. Deepen my trust in you that I might refrain from filling emptiness with busyness. Lead me to the places where I will find rest for my soul. Amen.

## Friday after the Second Sunday in Lent, Honor parents

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:16

*Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*

**Background:** Honoring of parents would both ensure that the needs of aging parents were attended to and that the traditions of the elders would be carefully passed down to the next generation.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 10:38-42

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. <sup>39</sup>She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. <sup>40</sup>But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' <sup>41</sup>But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; <sup>42</sup>there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.'*

**For Contemplation:** By sitting at Jesus' feet in order to listen and discern, Mary is breaking the norms for women of the day. In a way, by not honoring those norms, she is not honoring the tradition of her elders. How striking that Jesus sides with her.

In Christ we are now freed from the demands of the law. We have only one command from Jesus, that is to love one another<sup>6</sup>. To live this commandment, however, takes great listening and discernment. We listen through attending to the words of Jesus, we listen through conversations and prayer, and we listen to the wisdom of our parents and other elders and sages. Guided by the Spirit, we may choose to carry on many of the traditions of our elders; however, in each generation we must also be ready to let some of those traditions die.

As for parents, in Christ we are freed from the demands of Jewish law, and so our parents transition from being the subjects of primary honor (in an honor and shame culture), to becoming our neighbor. As with children, friends, and strangers, sometimes neighbor-love calls us to make great sacrifice, while at other times we may discern God's invitation to leave primary care for this particular neighbor in the hands of another.

- What family traditions do you embrace? What are you letting go?
- What religious traditions do you embrace? What are you letting go?
- What cultural traditions do you embrace? What are you letting go?

**Prayer:** Teach me to listen, O God, and help me to discern where would you have me hold on and where would you have me let go. Hold on to me, and do not let me go. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> John 13:34

## Monday after the Second Sunday in Lent, No murder

**First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:17

*You shall not murder.*

**Background:** This begins a series of commandments that are essential to ordering society. We cannot live in relative justice and peace if murder is commonplace. Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, however, will offer a reinterpretation of this commandment that pushes us deeper. Jesus said, “*You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not murder’; and ‘whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.*” Martin Luther identified two primary ways in which God’s law functions. The first, still, is to order society, (so don’t murder!). The second is to lay bare our sin and drive us to Christ. If we truly loved our neighbor, not only would we refrain from murder, but all forms of ill-will. Free of all resentments, jealousies, and judgments, we would consistently practice justice, mercy, and compassion. Yet we don’t; Christ help us!

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 10:25-37

*Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he said, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’<sup>26</sup> He said to him, ‘What is written in the law? What do you read there?’<sup>27</sup> He answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>28</sup> And he said to him, ‘You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.’ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’<sup>30</sup> Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead.<sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.<sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.<sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity.<sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him.<sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, “Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.”<sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?’<sup>37</sup> He said, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go and do likewise.’*

### For Contemplation:

- Who has been the object of your anger, resentment, or judgment recently?
- Is there something about this person that has triggered a fear in you? If so, what fear?
- When have you been on the receiving end of mercy recently?

**Prayer:** O God, we fall short of your command to love, forgive us. By the aid of your Holy Spirit warm our hearts, make us more compassionate and merciful to others and to ourselves. Amen.

## Tuesday after the Third Sunday in Lent, No adultery

**First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:18

*Neither shall you commit adultery.*

**Background:** Here is another commandment that is essential to the ordering of society. Adultery hurts partners, wounds children, and causes pain and disruption that ripple through myriad webs of relationship. So don't commit adultery! Once again, however, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount offers a reinterpretation of this commandment that pushes us deeper. Jesus said, "*But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart.*" It may be striking to our modern ears to hear Jesus' words addressed only to men. I believe that was because it was an age of deep patriarchy and each woman was essentially the property of a man, her father first then her husband. Women therefore had little agency. Now we are in a different age, and we can hear Jesus' words addressed to us all: male, female, non-gender binary; gay, straight, etc. Sex is part of God's good creation; it is not dirty or bad. The gift of sexuality is therefore sacred; however, it is also powerful, complex, and potentially harmful. Love of neighbor demands that we treat our neighbor as the subject of care rather than an object of lust.

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 8:1-3

*Soon afterwards he [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, <sup>2</sup>as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, <sup>3</sup>and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.*

**For Contemplation:** This passage reveals that Jesus was travelling not only with men, but with women too; women who were somehow free from the oversight of a father or husband and therefore had a degree of agency. We may wonder how they arranged eating, sleeping, toileting, dressing. We may presume that there was great love among them, along with that sort of intimacy that comes when people are sharing a meaningful mission together. So too, we may presume there were sexual attractions, that's only natural. Thus, we may also presume there were boundaries that respected the sacredness of one another's sexuality and personhood.

- Consider your own sexuality. For what do you give thanks and for what do you pray?
- Consider your neighbor's sexuality (friends, colleagues, partner, children, etc.) For what do you give thanks and for what do you pray?
- Consider the intimacy and the boundaries you have experienced sharing meaningful work or community with others? For what do you give thanks; for what do you pray?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, you invented sexuality and planted a measure of it within me. Due to the power of sin, at times this gift becomes complex and a burden. Help me to appropriately tend this gift, strengthen me to regard others as subjects and not objects, and please keep forgiving me when I miss the mark. Amen.

## Wednesday after the Third Sunday in Lent, No stealing

**First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:19

*Neither shall you steal.*

**Background:** Here is another commandment that is essential for ordering society. We cannot live in relative harmony and peace if stealing is commonplace. Once again, however, the new commandment to “love one another” pushes us deeper. In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther wrote of this commandment, “*We are to fear and love God, so that we neither take our neighbor’s money or property nor acquire them by using shoddy merchandise or crooked deals, but instead help them to improve their property and income.*” Note that for Luther there is a passive “Do not” part of this commandment and also an active “Do.” Do help your neighbor with property and finances.

**Gospel Reading:** Luke 9:23-25

*Then he [Jesus] said to them all, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup>For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. <sup>25</sup>What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?’*

**For Contemplation:** If we are to focus more on our neighbor’s property and finances, we will have to focus less on our own. If we are to attend more deeply to our neighbor’s health and wellbeing, we will have to attend less to our own. This does not require a rejection of our own needs, for the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” demands that we claim our own value and worth as God’s beloved child. This does, however, require a measure of sacrifice that is only possible if one possesses faith in God to provide. Why would I share money with a struggling neighbor today when I might need it tomorrow? Because I am trusting in God to provide for my tomorrow. Why would I continue to engage my neighbors in need? Because according to Jesus this is the path toward life.

- When have you stolen or been tempted to steal? What is the underlying motivation for that: greed, desire, fear, something else?
- Consider your savings or lack thereof. How much do you sense you are holding onto or worrying over out of prudent planning for the future? How much out of fear?
- Where is Jesus’ call to “Deny yourself and follow me” speaking to you in this moment?

**Prayer:** Gracious God, thank you for providing for me thus far along the way. Help me to trust more deeply that you will provide for me in the future, so that I might live more faithfully as a follower of Jesus today. Amen.

## Thursday after the Third Sunday in Lent, No false witness

### First Reading: Deuteronomy 5:20

*Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor.*

**Background:** We can't have a civil society without truth, so speak truth. In his Small Catechism Martin Luther writes of this commandment, *"We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."* Note that for Luther, once again there is a passive 'Do not' part of this commandment and an active 'Do.' When you are odds with someone, facing conflict, struggling in the midst of a complex situation, 'Do' seek to interpret everything the other person says in the best possible light, putting the best construction on their words.

### Gospel Reading: Luke 12:1-3

*Meanwhile, when the crowd gathered in thousands, so that they trampled on one another, he [Jesus] began to speak first to his disciples, 'Beware of the yeast of the Pharisees, that is, their hypocrisy. <sup>2</sup>Nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. <sup>3</sup>Therefore whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed from the housetops.*

**For Contemplation:** Everyone lies a little, some lie a lot. It appears that the more one practices lying, the more one loses the ability to distinguish truth; how surprised some (or many, or all) people will be on that day when everything is revealed. Truth telling takes discipline, along with courage and ultimately faith. It takes discipline because life is complex and opportunities to bend the truth for the sake of ease abound. It takes courage because speaking and hearing truth can be difficult, and because others may *not* put the best construction on our words and reject us. It takes faith because at times we don't know what the truth is and only through deep conversation is it revealed. Jesus is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life,<sup>7</sup> therefore, the Spirit of Christ Jesus is with us in all attempts at truth.

- In what settings or circumstances are you most tempted to bend the truth?
- In what settings or circumstances do you find more courage and faith to risk truth telling?
- How does your faith impact your relationship with truth?

**Prayer:** Thank you O God for those who have blessed me by speaking truth, and for those who have put the best construction on my words, demonstrating patience and love when I have struggled to speak. Forgive me for the times when I have betrayed others by my words, and when I have not interpreted the words of others in the best possible light. Give me an ample measure of your Spirit so that I might have greater discipline, courage, and faith in speaking and listening. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> John 14:6

## Friday after the Third Sunday in Lent, No Coveting

### **First Reading:** Deuteronomy 5:21

*Neither shall you covet your neighbor's wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbor's house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.*

**Background:** To covet is to be consumed with desire. It's one thing to admire your neighbor's handsome and strong ox (or house, or Mercedes, or partner), it's another to be filled with jealous envy. Capitalism functions well by fueling desire ('really now, are you certain that the thread count on your sheets is high enough?'); however, if desire crosses over into jealous envy in too many people, the social fabric of society will fray.

### **Gospel Reading:** Luke 15:18-22

*A certain ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' <sup>19</sup>Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. <sup>20</sup>You know the commandments: "You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and mother." ' <sup>21</sup>He replied, 'I have kept all these since my youth.' <sup>22</sup>When Jesus heard this, he said to him, 'There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.'*

**For Contemplation:** Logic says that the antidote to coveting is contentment; just be happy and content with what you already have, and you will fulfill this part of the law. Jesus' new commandment, however, the commandment that we are to practice neighbor love, pushes against this logic. To bask in contentment over what I have is still to keep my focus on possessions. "Make relationships your new focus," says the Spirit of the risen Christ.

- In what way or ways do your possessions give you joy, and strengthen your ability to tend to relationships with God, with friends and family, with those who suffer?
- In what way or ways do your possessions distract you and/or isolate you from others?
- What is your deepest desire?

**Prayer:** Thank you God for our homes, our clothing, our possessions, and all else you provide. Forgive me for the times when my desire for more has hurt my global neighbors and drawn me away from you and the path you would have me walk. Grant me wisdom to discern the proper place of possessions in my life and give me the faith to follow the sacrificial path of Jesus that leads to true riches. Amen.