

Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, and John 2:13-22

Have you ever played a card game like Uno or maybe even poker? My grandparents Gray would be appalled at this question, playing card games was against the rules in their home, but board games were OK. We played Chinese Checkers and Dominoes at their house, so maybe I should amend my question to have you ever played a board game or maybe an outdoor game like baseball or tennis? When you are new to the game what is the first thing to take place? You learn the rules.

Have you ever played a game where it seems as though the person who is teaching you is making up the rules as they go, or changing the rules as you play? It's not fun' it's confusing and unfair when this happens. Rules are important to a fair game. Rules are the way we show respect for all people.

Despite some people acting as though the words of today's reading from Genesis are the "10 suggestions" they really are rules for playing a fair game of living. I know, life is anything but a game. Life is hard. There are so many choices to make, decisions that have affected our future or our present life. If we have the 10 Commandments engraved on our heart and pay attention to them they will help guide us in our decision making.

Not only will they guide our decisions, they will draw us into a closer relationship with God. As God made covenants with Abraham to give him millions of descendants, as God made a covenant with Noah to never again destroy the entire earth by a flood, God is again making a covenant with Israel and with us. God gave the rules for life, written on stone, promising to be with those who love God and follow the commandments. And they really aren't that hard to follow.

Here's one attempt at a paraphrase: 1. Always put God first. 2. Don't treat objects or things as God. 3. Don't misuse God's name. 4. Take a day off. 5. Respect your parents. 6. Do not murder people. 7. Marriage is something special. 8. Do not take things that are not yours. 9. Do not tell lies. 10. Do not become jealous.

The amazing thing about these rules is that when you break them the relationship with God doesn't end, unless you want it to. When you've broken the rules you can ask for forgiveness, if you are willing to repent. Because of Jesus we have forgiveness, and through the power of the Holy Spirit we can turn away from evil. As we continue through the season of Lent, we move closer to the horrific events of Good Friday, and we find the means of our forgiveness – death on the cross, the final blood sacrifice.

As we heard in our Wednesday night Bible study, blood sacrifices were made only by the priests in the temple in Jerusalem. According to Bernhard Anderson, "in the priestly tradition sacrifice was..... a means of atonement, of healing the breach in the covenant relationship and reuniting the people in communion with God. Sacrifice was believed to be efficacious in restoring a broken relationship, not

because blood had magical power in itself, but because God had provided the symbolic means . . . by which guilt was pardoned. . . “

Paul tells us, in our reading from 1 Corinthians today, that only Christians would find wisdom in the Roman cross. Only Christians would find wisdom in believing that Jesus will take away our sins allowing us to stand blameless in front of God on that day. As Christians we believe that what seems like the end is not the end.

Maybe you're going through something that seems like the end of the world to you. An illness, the loss of a spouse, or parent, maybe it's the loss of your income. Whatever it is, know that it is not the end. I'm reading a series called *The Frank Bennett Adirondack Mountain Mysteries*, and in a surprising turn of a conversation with the pastor, the main character heard Rev. Bob say, “With God the worst thing is never the last thing. After the crucifixion came the resurrection.”

That is what Jesus is trying to get across as he speaks with the religious elite after overturning the tables in the temple in John's gospel. Even though all 3 of the synoptic gospels place the clearing of the temple at the beginning of Holy Week, John places the event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. For John it immediately gives a reason for the antagonism between the religious authorities and Jesus. This is not Jesus' first trip to Jerusalem, remember his family made yearly trips to celebrate the Passover festival. Yet this is when he chose to act against the Judean sacrificial system.

It isn't just about the buying and selling that is going on in the temple, it is about the entire system of animal sacrifice. This reminds us of the words he said to the Samaritan woman at the well, that God would be worshipped in spirit and in truth. A system of sacrifice would no longer be necessary.

When the religious authorities questioned Jesus for the reason he overturned the tables and chased out the people and animals, Jesus told them that if the temple was destroyed it would be rebuilt in 3 days. They had no concept of a human being as a temple so they could not have imagined Jesus was speaking of himself. We have the luxury of knowing the entire story of Jesus' life. We know Jesus was speaking of himself, how, after he was crucified and buried, he would rise from the dead. John tells us that it was after his death and resurrection the disciples remembered how three years earlier Jesus had said that he would be raised up.

It is upon this that our faith is based; Jesus overcame death so that those who believe he is God's son whose death took away our sin will be saved. When we break the rules God gave us to live by, we can find forgiveness because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It may be foolishness to those who don't believe, but to we who are Christ-followers it is a lifeline. Remember, and I quote, “With God the worst thing is never the last thing. After the crucifixion came the resurrection.” All glory be to God. Amen.