



EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST SUNDAY, OCTOBER 4TH, 2020

**GOD:
THE BEST NAME WE HAVE FOR THE MYSTERY
WE DO NOT KNOW**



Drawing on an image of YHYW in the book of Exodus, in which the Israelites, escaping from slavery in Egypt, are led by a cloud, a 14th century unnamed monk wrote a classic book on prayer, entitled *The Cloud of Unknowing*. This short book is written to a novice monk instructing and encouraging him to persevere in contemplative, silent prayer. God cannot be known definitively. It is easier to say what God is not, rather than what God is.

In a more recent book, *Cloud of the Impossible*, theologian Catherine Keller refers to the word 'God' as a "nickname" for the one who cannot be named.

And yet this one who cannot be named is revealed: in steadfast love; in justice; in mercy; in forgiveness; in community; in neighbourliness; and for Christians through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Both of our readings today, point us to living as a community that reveals something of the nature of the one who cannot be named, who is the ground of all being, who is the love that holds it all together.

GATHERING

Preparing Ourselves: Dominus Spiritus Est (from the Taize Community)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sYA984m1pk>

Invitation to Worship

In the name of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lighting the Paschal Candle

Hymn: “Gather us in” Words and music by Marty Haugen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbNXqjwh8is>

Opening Prayers

These prayers with which we open our liturgy this morning, are centred upon the Hebrew reading for today: Exodus 20:1-20, the well-known “Ten Commandments” or as the Hebrew has it, the “Ten Words”. Christians tend toward two ways of understanding the Ten Commandments: ways that are quite contrary. The first, is to see them as rules for life, in the sense of hard and fast, dogmatic, absolutes. Here the tendency is to ‘rule-bound’ religion. The second, is to see these commandments as ‘inclusively transcended’, in the sense of embraced, but understood as a grace, not as a law, to be imposed. This is in fact the broad approach in Matthew’s Gospel, where – remember last week – Matthew contends with legalist Jewish Christians, and arrives at a position of the “law of love” that is love fulfills the law.

If we go back even to the Exodus story of which the “Ten Commandments” are a part, the point to be made is that for the Hebrew these Commandments and the law in general, were precisely expressions of God’s free love, of divine grace. Having experienced God’s gracious liberation through the Exodus, the Commandments are an expression of how to put that same liberating grace into effect in the new Hebrew society, in the Promised Land. The commandments are about social and political grace, so that Hebrew society will be more than just a carbon-copy of the brutal authoritarian kingdoms of the ancient world

***This is a moment of new creation:
blast of a trumpet and fire and smoke
and the people gathered at the foot of a mountain,
Moses on the summit, receiving words:***

words that are beacons, words that cast shadow,
words that are fire-sparks struck from stone,
words that are trumpeted, calling to silence,
words that will echo through ages to come,

words that are the beating heart of a covenant,
 words of requirement, words that are gift,
 words that are bones in the body of a people,
 words that are blood flowing into their veins,

words that are power, spoken to weakness,
 words that are freedom because they point to a new way of living,
 words that challenge us, words that summon us,
 words that are song for a life-long dance,

words that are dwelling place, words of foundation,
 words that are law, given in grace,
 words that are signposts, words that are journey,
 words that are a pathway pointing to peace.

***This is a moment of new creation:
 blast of a trumpet and fire and smoke
 and we are the people at the foot of a mountain
 looking to live creatively, to make the world a home.***

Amen

Sharing the Peace

The peace of the Lord be with you:
And also with you.

We share the peace with one another.

HEARING THE WORD

Some Preliminary Thoughts on God, Mystery and the Ethical

“Yahweh is a God who commands (*swh*). The foremost mode by which Yahweh communicates to Israel is by commandment (*miswah*) and Israel’s crucial mode of engagement is by obedience (*sm*). Chapter 20 of the Book of Exodus is God’s “primal command.”
Walter Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament

“This brutal life becomes a sensible object. To him who would describe it, it presents itself as devoid of order and difficult to order, but tangible, earthy, alive.”

Gregory, Bishop of Tours, Sixth Century

There is in the work of Jacques Derrida, “a desire beyond desire, as a desire for God... a restless heart that desires we do not know [fully] quite what, where the name of God is the name of our desire even as it is the best name we have for what we do not know.”

John Caputo on the post-modern philosopher, Jacques Derrida

“We are left then with a justice to come that denounces the injustice in what at present calls itself just or democratic.” We do not know [fully] what this justice is, but we do know “that nothing present can lay claim to it”

John Caputo on the ethical challenge and conundrum of the Christian

Exodus 20:1-4, 7-10a, 12-20 (Good News Translation)

The great saga of Israel's foundation culminates in Exodus, chapter 20 and in particular in the so-called Decalogue or “ten words”. Two points are worth making prior to reading this text. First, there is the point that God is dramatically “other” than the human creature. Drawing near to God is a dangerous business where you take your life in your hands. This is not about God as inherently brutal or violent, but rather the idea that Yahweh transcends his creation and is known to us only through particular historical mediations: liberation, the encoded law and worship. This sits oddly with modern western thought which has spent much of its time creating viceroy's or substitutes for God: reason, nature, culture, the state and even humanity itself. The second point, is that this law is given by the one who freed people from oppression. This then, is the purpose of the law, to serve as an ongoing means of liberation and freedom. It is a means of grace. This is something that Christians often get wrong. Of course, rules have their problems, especially divine ones, for they are often misinterpreted. But, Jesus himself, never rejects the law, but instead reinterprets it through the lens of love.

20 God spoke, and these were his words: ²“I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

³“Worship no god but me.

⁴“Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth.

⁷“Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the LORD your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.⁸“Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. ⁹You have six days in which to do your work, ¹⁰but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me.

12 “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

13 “Do not commit murder.

14 “Do not commit adultery.

15 “Do not steal.

16 “Do not accuse anyone falsely.

17 “Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns.”

18 When the people heard the thunder and the trumpet blast and saw the lightning and the smoking mountain, they trembled with fear and stood a long way off. 19 They said to Moses, “If you speak to us, we will listen; but we are afraid that if God speaks to us, we will die.”

20 Moses replied, “Don't be afraid; God has only come to test you and make you keep on obeying him, so that you will not sin.”

Psalm 19 (New International Version)

Psalm 19 divides into two sections, vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-14, with the subject matter changing from an expression of the glory of God seen in the canopy of space to a psalm focusing on the ‘law of the Lord.’ Each of these two sections can be further subdivided into two parts.

Verses 1 to 6 break up into vv. 1-4a, a hymn based on a reflection on creation, and vv. 4b-6 which sings the praises of the sun. These latter verses could have been an ancient hymn to the sun-god thoroughly adapted for Israelite use, now with the sun controlled by Israel's God (v. 4b). Finally, vv. 7-14 can also be subdivided into vv. 7-10, which focus on the praise of *torah*, and vv. 11-14, which constitute a personal prayer of supplication.

We should also note that there are certain connections between the two major parts of the psalm: word connections (e.g. ‘hid’ and ‘hide’ in vv. 6 and 12; ‘heart’ in vv. 8 and 14). Also the theme of ‘speech’ ties the psalm together (e.g. in vv. 1, 2, and 14, and presumed in the words ‘precepts’ and ‘commandments’). These connections invite us to consider the psalm as a unity with the meaning of the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

1 The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

2 ***Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.***

3 They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

4 ***Yet their voice^[b] goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.***

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶ ***It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.***

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ ***The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.***

***The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.***

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ ***They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;***

they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² ***But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.***

¹³ Keep your servant also from wilful sins;
may they not rule over me.

Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ ***May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.***

Philippians 3:4-14 (Good News Translation)

The target of Paul's attack here, is not so much Jews as Jewish Christians, who dispute Paul's legitimacy and object to his attitude to scripture. They demanded that scripture and its commands were infallible, including the practice of male circumcision, and saw Paul as watering things down in the interests of winning people to his way. Paul, for his part, saw their fundamentalism as one of the very things which stood in the way of true faith and from which people needed to be liberated. Paul is not abandoning scripture, let alone abandoning God, but he is abandoning a theology based on seeking to please God by zealous protection of divine laws. He is abandoning a theology which sees God as obsessed with himself and preoccupied with becoming angry and offended when things are

not done in exactly the prescribed way. In Christ, he has found an understanding and embodiment of God which says that God's being is characterised by love and generosity, which seeks to reconcile people from their estrangement and their captivity - including their captivity to fundamentalist religion.

⁴ I could, of course, put my trust in such things. If any of you think you can trust in external ceremonies, I have even more reason to feel that way. ⁵ I was circumcised when I was a week old. I am an Israelite by birth, of the tribe of Benjamin, a pure-blooded Hebrew. As far as keeping the Jewish Law is concerned, I was a Pharisee, ⁶ and I was so zealous that I persecuted the church. As far as a person can be righteous by obeying the commands of the Law, I was without fault. ⁷ But all those things that I might count as profit I now reckon as loss for Christ's sake. ⁸ Not only those things; I reckon everything as complete loss for the sake of what is so much more valuable, the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have thrown everything away; I consider it all as mere garbage, so that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be completely united with him. I no longer have a righteousness of my own, the kind that is gained by obeying the Law. I now have the righteousness that is given through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is based on faith. ¹⁰ All I want is to know Christ and to experience the power of his resurrection, to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death, ¹¹ in the hope that I myself will be raised from death to life.

¹² I do not claim that I have already succeeded or have already become perfect. I keep striving to win the prize for which Christ Jesus has already won me to himself. ¹³ Of course, my friends, I really do not^a think that I have already won it; the one thing I do, however, is to forget what is behind me and do my best to reach what is ahead. ¹⁴ So I run straight toward the goal in order to win the prize, which is God's call through Christ Jesus to the life above.

Matthew 21:33-46 (The Message)

This is the fourth parable that we have heard in as many weeks. Three weeks ago, we heard of the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (18:23-35), two weeks ago, the Parable of the Generous Vineyard Owner/Employer (20:1-16) and last week, the Parable of the Two Sons (21:23-32) – all of which we incorporated into our trilogy of stewardship. Today we listen to the story of the Wicked Tenants (21:33-46). Ultimately all these stories are about authority and its use and abuse, where the emphasis is upon graciousness and generosity in the light of the kingdom that Jesus puts into place. In its context of Matthew's community, decades after Jesus had departed, this story was heard as one that asks, who carries God's authority: the synagogue or the Christian community? Matthew and his community, have been struggling, without success, to position themselves as leaders of Israel's faith and are being increasingly driven to the margins by resurgent Pharisaism. This conflict between the synagogue and the church, grounded in mutual antipathy early on, needs to be read with great care, aware as we are

that the nefarious results furnished a 'theological foundation' for anti-Semitism: hatred of Jews for being Jews.

33-34 "Here's another story. Listen closely. There was once a man, a wealthy farmer, who planted a vineyard. He fenced it, dug a winepress, put up a watchtower, then turned it over to the farmhands and went off on a trip. When it was time to harvest the grapes, he sent his servants back to collect his profits.

35-37 "The farmhands grabbed the first servant and beat him up. The next one they murdered. They threw stones at the third but he got away. The owner tried again, sending more servants. They got the same treatment. The owner was at the end of his rope. He decided to send his son. 'Surely,' he thought, 'they will respect my son.'

38-39 "But when the farmhands saw the son arrive, they rubbed their hands in greed. 'This is the heir! Let's kill him and have it all for ourselves.' They grabbed him, threw him out, and killed him.

40 "Now, when the owner of the vineyard arrives home from his trip, what do you think he will do to the farmhands?"

41 "He'll kill them—a rotten bunch, and good riddance," they answered. "Then he'll assign the vineyard to farmhands who will hand over the profits when it's time."

42-44 Jesus said, "Right—and you can read it for yourselves in your Bibles:

The stone the masons threw out
is now the cornerstone.

This is God's work;

we rub our eyes, we can hardly believe it!

"This is the way it is with you. God's kingdom will be taken back from you and handed over to a people who will live out a kingdom life. Whoever stumbles on this Stone gets shattered; whoever the Stone falls on gets smashed."

45-46 When the religious leaders heard this story, they knew it was aimed at them. They wanted to arrest Jesus and put him in jail, but, intimidated by public opinion, they held back. Most people held him to be a prophet of God.

Song: "If you had a vineyard" Sinead O'Connor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kf24-rgyOel>

*If you had a vineyard on a beautiful hill
and you fenced it and cleaned it
of all stones until you planted it
with the choicest of vines and you even built a tower
and a press to make wine and you looked that it would bring
forth sweet grapes what would you say?
Jerusalem and Judah you be the judges I pray
between me and my vineyard.
This is what God says*

*What more could I have done in it
that I did not do?
Why when I ask it for sweetness it brings only bitterness.*

*For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel
and the men of Judah his pleasant plant.
And he looks for justice but beholds oppression.
And he hopes for equality but hears a cry.
Jerusalem and Judah, this is God's reply.*

*Sadness will come to those who build house to house
and lay field to field 'til there's room
for none but you who dwell in the land
Oh in the land.
And sadness will come to those
who call evil good and good evil;
who present darkness as light and light as darkness
Who present as sweetness only the things which are bitterness.*

*Oh that my eyes were a fountain of tears
that I might weep for my poor people.*

*For every boot stamped with fierceness
for every cloak rolled in blood
Jerusalem and Judah
I'd cry if I could.*

Some Thoughts

Let's Give: Our Offerings

Doxology

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,
praise him, all creatures here below,
praise him above, ye heavenly host,
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

Prayer of Dedication

The Sacrament

Song: "in remembrance of me"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nV_kFlsKrQU

Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Let us lift up our hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Thanks and praise, glory and honour are rightly yours

Our Lord and God,

For you alone are worthy.

In time beyond our dreaming,

You brought forth light out of darkness,

And in the love of Christ your Son,

You set women and men at the heart of your creation.

And so we praise you,

with the faithful of every time and place,

joining with the choirs of angels and the whole creation

in the eternal hymn

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
Heaven and earth
are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.***

***Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest***

Through him,
in him
and because of him,
We affirm the Church's faith

***Christ has died.
Christ has risen.
Christ will come again.***

Institution

Lord's Prayer

Let us say the Lord's Prayer

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.***

***Forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial***

and deliver us from evil.

***For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.***

Breaking of the Bread

Christ is the bread of joy
Who shares food with sinners.

Christ is the cup of life,
Who revives the faint-hearted

Let us receive what we are;
Let us become what we receive.

Lamb of God

Jesus, Wisdom of God,
have mercy on us

Jesus, Word made flesh,
have mercy on us

Jesus, Liberator of creation
grant us peace.

Communion

Prayer after Communion

Blessed be God who calls us together
Praise to God who makes us one people

Blessed be God who has forgiven our sin
Praise to God who gives us hope and freedom

Blessed be God whose word is proclaimed
Praise to God who is revealed as lover

Blessed be God who alone has called us
We offer all that we are and all we shall become

Prayers of the People

At the end of each prayer/petition with the words, ***Lord, hear our prayer*** we say,
“and show us your way”

Closing Hymn: “Sent forth by God’s blessing” sung by Sheryl Wood

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt2aU6ltXt0>

Blessing and Sending Out

“What does the Lord require of you
 but to do justice, and to love kindness,
 and to walk humbly with your God”

The blessing of God almighty,
 the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
 For justice and love,
 Be upon you and remain with you always. Amen

Our service has ended. But our mission has just started.
 Go in peace to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ

For Meditation: Taize “Nada te turb”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=go1-BoDD7CI&list=PLDA6158B7937D919F>

Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
 Who has God, lacks nothing
 Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
 God alone is sufficient
 Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
 Who has God, lacks nothing
 Everything passes, God does not change (nothing disturb you, nothing scare
 you)
 Patience reaches everything (Only God is enough)
 Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
 Whoever has God, lacks nothing
 Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
 God alone is sufficient
 In Christ my trust (nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you)

And from Him only my hold (Who has God, lacks nothing)
In your tiredness my breath (nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you)
And in his imitation my laziness (Only God is enough)
Here lies my firmness (nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you)
Here is my security
The proof of my truth
The sample of my firmness (Only God is enough)
Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
Who has God, lacks nothing
Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
God alone is sufficient
Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
Whoever has God, lacks nothing
You no longer sleep, you do not sleep (Nothing disturbs you, nothing scares you)
Well, there is no peace on Earth (Only God is enough)
There is no coward (nothing disturb you, nothing scare you)
Let's venture life (Whoever has God, lacks nothing)
There is no need to fear, do not sleep (Nothing disturb you, nothing scare you)
Let's venture life (Only God is enough)
Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
Who has God, lacks nothing
Nothing disturb you, nothing frighten you
God alone is sufficient