

Exodus 20:1-17

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

John 2:13-22

Cleansed and Reclaimed

There are familiar verses in scripture that most everyone has heard, but may not recognize where they come from. It starts, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens."¹ (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8) The second point in the list says there is "a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot." If you are someone who farms or gardens, you know very well about planting and uprooting. These things need to be done in their proper time and order in order for there to be anything to harvest. Weeding or spraying for weeds is necessary in order that the garden, flower beds, or fields can grow without being taken over by plants that destroy. We uproot anything that will take away from the value or beauty of what we are trying to grow.

The scriptures today all speak to a type of uprooting in order to allow healthy growth, this growth however is about humans, our relationship with God, and our relationship with each other. And think of this as broadly as you can. It is not just about our individual relationships but also about how we live in community with one another in the church, in our area, and in the world.

These three scriptures might not appear to have much in common and through I could have created a sermon about each one of the scriptures from Exodus, 1 Corinthians, or Gospel of John, today we are looking at a common thread among them and that is how each can be used for correction, and by correction I mean, giving us direction or correcting our course of living, as well as the reclaiming of our lives as followers of Christ.

Let's start with the John. This is wild Jesus. Or at least that is what it feels like. This is not the Jesus we talk about very often. We like our baby Jesus and our grown-up Jesus to be meek and mild. This temper tantrum Jesus is not the one we expect. This Jesus is filled with emotion. On the surface one might wonder what is going on. Jesus' anger though is about access to God and what was going on in the temple limited people's access. It was not that the business going on there was unholy in the sense that people were truly trying to honour the expectations of worship at the temple, but the trading and

¹ All scripture quotations taken from *New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition*. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

exchanging was happening in the area where those who were not Jewish were allowed to worship. And very likely it had become a place of some corruption. Jesus' clearing of the temple was an act of making room, reclaiming God's house for prayer and holiness.

Moving on to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, this place too was filled with temptations and corruption. The city was metropolitan in flavour and boasted temples that were filled with all kinds of unsavory behaviours, but Paul's letter is addressed to those who were part of the Christian church. It was their behaviour that was being called into question. It seems that there were divisions and cracks appearing in the fabric of the community of faith starting with those who thought that they were wiser or more powerful than others. It may have been divisions of class, of those who were more prosperous and those who were more learned. Whatever was happening, Paul is writing in a not so happy tone. In this particular part of his letter, he seems to be addressing those who think themselves wiser than others, and Paul simply says, you think you are wise, but you are foolish. For "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength." (1 Corinthians 1:25) Those who have power are those who believe in the power of the cross which was the power of God to transform life.

The other reading today focused on what we have come to know as the Ten Commandments. So often these words have been used in ways that seem to limit us. They are handed down to us as rules that feel stifling, even when something like, thou shalt not murder, is a pretty standard rule of thumb. However, what these words are giving us are words that talk about relationship. The first of them talk about our relationship with God and the rest about how to be in relationship with one another. As Jesus summed them up, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39)

Sometimes we forget that Jesus was Jewish and so he held all of the what we call Old Testament scriptures as valuable. With Jesus we have come to understand how God's love permeates all of the scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. We also forget that these "laws" given to us in the Commandments are about freedom and life for all.

So why in this time of Lent are we stringing these readings together? Well, it is because they are all about living in relationship, they are about letting God do God's work in us. Just as Jesus cleansed the temple of all that was not life giving, so Jesus comes to us to say, what in your life needs to be cleansed? What is in your heart, your mind, and in your body, that keeps you from living a transformed life? A life that honours God, yourself, and others? A life filled with love for God, yourself, and others?

Paul in his letter, reminds us to get out of our own way and that of others so that we can really see the sacrifice made on our behalf by Jesus and allow the wisdom and power of God to direct our days, our thinking, and our behaviours. And really that is what the Ten Commandments are about, how to live our lives in ways that connect us to God and other another.

These scriptures are all about becoming people of light, love, and life. The Christian life is not meant to be burdensome, but rather life giving! It is about opening ourselves up to Jesus, letting our hearts, minds, and bodies be bound to the love, value, and compassion that is ours to claim as image bearers of God. And though we experience hardship and struggle, when it is lived with the knowledge that we are loved and worthy of love it guides us through the challenging parts, knowing that God goes with us and if we are living out our calling to be image bearers of God, then we go with others in their struggle. We are present and prepared to walk along side those who have yet to figure out that they are valuable and worthy of love, kindness, and justice. Justice born out of God's love for the most vulnerable in our society and for each of us.

In this season of Lent, we are invited to look at our lives, reflect on our lives, to see what needs to be weeded out, plucked up, cleared out of hearts and minds, responding to the work of the Holy Spirit in us that bears witness to Jesus and God's love, care, and compassion for us...us as individuals and us as humanity. Allowing Jesus to reclaim a space in our hearts meant for prayer and praise, healing and hope.

Sometimes this looks and feels like chaos, maybe even anger, yet the disruption can be devotion allowing love to make room in our entire being. As Ron Rienstra puts it, "Invite the Spirit to look at the garden and ask what needs to be pulled up by the roots, what needs to be cut back, and what needs room to breathe and bear fruit. Lent is a season for holy demolition and careful cultivation so that God's presence may take up residence again and bring new life."²

May you know, this day and in the days to come, the Spirit at work in the garden of your life and our life together as community. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

² Ron Rienstra. Grounded and Growing—Journeying from Lent to Easter A - Year of Grounded and Growing
As Published on the Reformed Worship website January 2026