

## LIVING TOGETHER FAITHFULLY

Lent 3 Year B

Ex. 20:1-17; Ps. 19; 1 Cor. 1:18-25; Jn. 2:13-22

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I suppose all of us, at one time or another—or perhaps even several times—have gazed up into the sky on a clear night and wondered—just wondered—at God’s marvellous creation. Even if you are not a Christian, there still has to be wonder there—you just can’t help it. My first ministry placement was in the Wandoan and Taroom districts, about three and a half hours, east north-east of Toowoomba, and anyone who has lived far out into the country, away from all city and industry lights, knows how gloriously different it is, than when you are in the city. The night sky is just so much clearer—and so much brighter—to see the vast expanse above and the twinkling of the stars, which are numbered beyond measure. For a Christian, what a marvellous declaration of the glory of God it is.

The Christian faith recognises two ways in which God has made the revelation of himself to us: through nature and through grace. Another way of saying the same thing is: “Through Creation and through Holy Scripture.” These are the two means that God has given us through which to know him.

Starting with the inspired scriptures, sometimes Christians have reached back, as it were, to speak of nature itself as a sort of book—a sacred scroll in which God is revealed. Nature itself provides a “text,” analogous to the scriptures. For example, a twelfth-century Englishman, Alexander Neckam, said that “the world is inscribed with the pen of God; for anyone who understands it, it is work of literature.” Another, more contemporary Frenchman, Richard St. Victor, said that “the whole of this sensible world is like a book written by the finger of God.” Similarly, Garnier of Rochford, a contemporary of Richard, said that God speaks to us through two books, nature and the Law (Torah).

Both nature and the Law (or the Scriptures) are given to us so that we might know God. And so Psalm 19 begins:

*<sup>1</sup> The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.*

*<sup>2</sup> Day to day pours forth speech,  
and night to night declares knowledge.*

*<sup>3</sup> There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;*

*<sup>4</sup> yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.*

In our reading this morning from the book of Exodus, we receive 10 rules for living in a loving community. The community who receive these words were once an enslaved

people now wandering in the wilderness. These rules or commandments are a covenant within the already-existing covenant made with Abraham and Sarah and are written for a particular time, context, and people. Over the last couple of weeks we have been learning something about covenants—in particular, God’s covenants with his people. Our scripture readings for today, help to keep this theme going.

We need to note, however, that these Ten Commandments were given, not so that the people would be oppressed by a bunch of rules and regulations (which it later seemed to become), but that the people would learn to live together in a loving and worshipping community. These are laws of love, given for the well-being of the community.

Psalms 19 goes on to say, in relation to the Law of the Lord:

*7 The law of the Lord is perfect,  
reviving the soul;  
the decrees of the Lord are sure,  
making wise the simple;  
8 the precepts of the Lord are right,  
rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of the Lord is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;  
9 the fear of the Lord is pure,  
enduring forever;  
the ordinances of the Lord are true  
and righteous altogether.*

Here, the psalmist states that God’s law can help people to live well. The psalm begins by speaking to how God is revealed and offers an understanding—a perspective, if you like—of human life within God’s creation.

Psalms 19 is divided into three sections. Verses 1 – 6 are a creation hymn of praise, which we have just elaborated. Here, the psalmist uses metaphors, phrases, and imagery to describe the wonder of creation. Singing along with creation, the psalmist declares that all creation praises God’s glory.

The second section of the psalm (vv. 7–10) speaks of God’s law, and declares a love for the law, and that under the law, people have responsibilities. It notes that God is revealed in both the scriptures and the law.

The psalm’s third section (vv. 11–14) is more of a prayer that speaks to God the Creator. Verse 14, of course, the final verse of Psalm 19, has been immortalised in song by the group, Bony M.

C.S. Lewis considered Psalm 19 the be “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.” As remarkable as the lyrical quality of Psalm 19 is, however it contains an extraordinary theological claim. In essence, Psalm 19 affirms that love is the basic reality. According to the psalmist, the God whose sovereignty is proclaimed by cosmic voices is the God who has addressed a personal word to humankind—the Law (or Torah). And as I have already said, this Law has not been given to us as a means of enforcement, but rather as a declaration of love. Our God is not a God of retribution for failure but a God of forgiveness and restoration. God is love, and love is the force that drives the cosmos.

So, what does this psalm say about the Law of the Lord?

1. *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.* The word “perfect” here means all-encompassing. Just as the sun’s heavenly circuit encompasses all the earth, so God’s law encompasses all of our lives. Nothing is hidden. As the sun energises the earth and makes it possible, so God’s Law makes life possible for us. It restores life and energy to us. Life and the very structure of the universe depends just as much on the Law of God as it depends on the daily rising of the sun.
2. The rest of verse 7 and verse 8 describe the effect of God’s word on humanity. It reads: *The decrees of the Lord are sure making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes.* Here, the psalmist is simply saying that God’s Law accomplishes what God intends for human life: wisdom and enlightenment.
3. *The fear of the Lord is pure enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.* Here the word “fear” relates to our response of conformity to God’s word—our willingness to live the way God wants us to live. Living according to God’s word makes one pure. It produces a cleanliness that endures. Hence, living according to God’s word constitutes righteousness—life as God intends it. Neither wealth nor the richest food can make life possible the way God’s instruction does.

In short, Psalm 19 declares that while creation *does* offer a certain kind or amount of knowledge about God, God has also addressed a personal word to humanity: God’s Law makes life possible and orders it rightly. The implications of this are radical. Human life can be adequately understood *only* in relationship to God. This is a completely opposite understanding to that of society, both as it was when this psalm was written and the society in which we live today. We do not live by our ability to earn, achieve, or possess but, said Jesus to the tempter in the wilderness, by “every word that comes from the mouth of God.” (Mt. 4:4)

Paul, in writing to the church in Corinth, as you heard this morning in the epistle reading, (1 Cor. 1:18–25 ) also challenges conventional wisdom. Paul writes about what will “save” people: being foolish, not wise; being weak, not strong; being low and despised, not of means. God challenges the status quo and the power of societal norms by turning conventions upside down.

In our gospel reading for this morning from John’s account, again Jesus turns things upside down—literally. The temple had a marketplace where the sale of animals was for the offering of animal sacrifices. It was also a place where currency could be exchanged into a standard coinage to purchase animals for sacrifice and the temple tax. Jesus, filled with righteous anger, turns over the marketplace tables and critiques the market system. He calls for a dismantling of unjust systems. Jesus also challenges the way of societal norms and invites people into a different way of faithful living—a way based on righteousness and faith.

Of course, the final thing to say about the “word” of God about is the One whom John, right at the beginning of his gospel account, refers to *as* the Word of God. Here he is not speaking of the Law or Torah, but of Jesus Christ himself—the ultimate and final Word of God to humankind—of whom, after Jesus was baptised by John in the desert, God said, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” (Mk. 9:7) As the writer to the Hebrews states:

*Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. (Heb. 1:1-2)*

Jesus Christ is the greatest revelation of God to humanity. As Jesus said, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” It is to him the scriptures, both in the Old and New Covenants, point. He is the Word of God revealed in the word of God, the scriptures. And it is he who reveals to us how we can live together faithfully.

The Season of Lent is an opportunity to continue to reflect on what it means to live faithfully together. God calls us to respond in faith in our daily lives. We hear the Word of God in many ways—through the scriptures, through other Christians, from the pulpit, and through Jesus Christ himself. God’s word gives life and brings redemption.

Knowing that God has offered loving rules, an invitation to praise, challenges to the status quo, and is committed to justice, we might, during this time of Lent, ask ourselves: How then shall we live?

To Jesus, our Word and Saviour, be all glory, honour, majesty and praise. Amen.