

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
Third Sunday in Lent - Year B

**Readings** - Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

**ACNA Readings** - Exodus 20:1-21; Psalm 19:7-14; Romans 7:12-25; John 2:13-22

**Introduction and Common Theme** - We continue our journey through Lent,<sup>1</sup> and a key focus of these readings is upon the revelation of God. Namely, how does God make himself and his ways known?

At the heart of both Judaism and Christianity is the understanding that faith is revealed by God. Faith is not something we discover from within ourselves (although there is an emphasis on our personal seeking for the truth), but rather it is our response to God's grace displayed through revelatory acts. In biblical Judaism, there are three core revelatory acts, namely creation, the covenant with Abraham, and the exodus, with a focus on the giving of the Torah. Christianity affirms and celebrates these three revelatory acts and adds the fourth decisive act, namely the person and work of Jesus the Messiah – especially his deity and humanity, reflected perfectly in his incarnation, his sinless life, his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, his atoning sacrificial death, his resurrection, his ascension, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and his promised return.

**Hebraic Perspective** - Jewish exegesis almost always involves asking questions. What was the purpose of the exodus? If the object was to get the people of Israel into the promised land, then God would have given Moses better directions. The making of the covenant and the giving of the Torah is one of the most important moments of the exodus, but it was not the initial intention. It is at Mount Sinai that God is revealed to Israel and, in receiving the divine instructions from the Lord, they know how to worship him. Worship of the Lord was the original purpose of the exodus (Exod 4:22-23). The exodus was not about political freedom nor the ultimate possession of land, although those elements are certainly present. It is about worship, love, redemption, and adoration of God who is mighty to save. These aspects of love and worship come together in symbiosis with obedience and commandments. As Jesus says, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Psalm 19 also reflects on the character of the Torah and its use; verses 7-8 describe the Torah as perfect and good for the heart and soul. This leads the worshipper to conclude and acknowledge that God is the Rock and the Redeemer.

**First Reading: Exodus 20:1-17** - The opening verses (vv. 1-2) are the foundation for what follows; it is because of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt that the people of Israel are called to obey the commandments. God's saving action is the catalyst for everything. All the history of Israel which follows on from here and the emerging of the Church are due to the gracious acts of God.

The first three commandments are linked to the people's relationship to God. We see here a total and radical monotheism. Following on from this, the focus of the commandments turns to ethical living

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<sup>1</sup> See notes from the first Sunday in Lent for an introduction to Lent and some reflections upon Lent and a possible link to the Jewish liturgical calendar.

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within human relationships, beginning with the gift of the Sabbath and concluding with a deep honouring and respect for neighbours.

**Second Reading: Psalm 19** - God reveals his glory and his works through creation. This truth is affirmed in Romans 1:19-20 as Paul sets out the message of the gospel.

Psalm 19 completes the “circle of praise” begun in Psalm 18. Here God is extolled for the gift of creation (vv. 1-6) and, following on from our Exodus reading, the gift of the Torah (vv. 7-11).

The sun (v. 6) is not to be worshipped, as was the case in many pagan communities of the ancient near east (see Jer 8:2, Ezek 8:16, etc.), but rather the sun is part of the created order. It is the ultimate metaphor of the glory of God (see Ps 84:11 and Isa 60:19-22).

**Third Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25** - Paul here is writing to the early Church community in Corinth, probably from Ephesus in the year 54 or 55. The focus here is on the cross and the crucified Messiah. It is here that God is fully known. This revelation overturns the assumptions and desires of those who seek human wisdom or miraculous signs (v. 22). Note here that the preaching of the gospel is not foolish, but the message of the gospel is viewed by many in the world as foolishness.

In 1 Corinthians 1:19, Paul quotes from Isaiah 29:14. There the so-called “wise” in Judah are denounced for their plan to seek an alliance with Egypt while facing the threat of Assyria. Paul may also have had in his mind the teaching of Jesus recorded in Luke 10:21-22.

The overarching point here is that all human devised systems of philosophy are flawed – God does not intend that people will know him through human wisdom or philosophical endeavours but through the gospel of the crucified and risen Messiah.

**Fourth Reading: John 2:13-22** - As Jesus clears the temple courts, he is confronted by those who demanded a sign which will affirm his authority for such a radical action (v. 18). In his response to this, he points to the greatest revelatory action which will occur, namely his resurrection from the dead. The true meaning of his reply is only understood by his disciples after his resurrection (v. 22).

The claim here by Jesus that he is the true temple (dwelling place of God) and the misunderstanding around this (see Mark 14:57-59 and 15:29) is almost certainly what led to his arrest. It may also be what is behind the charge against Stephen (see Acts 6:14).

This reading is one I often share and teach from while taking visitors to the temple steps in Jerusalem. It is from this reading that we begin to see how Jesus redefined and challenged many prevailing Jewish ideas about the temple. Also, this reading leads us to explore more about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The highest description or definition of being a Christian is, I believe, presented in 2 Corinthians

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6:16, “For we are the temple of the living God.” From this text, theologians declare that pneumatology is imminent Christology. In other words, the work of the Holy Spirit is inseparable from the work of the risen Jesus. The gift of the Holy Spirit is not therefore a gift from God but is a gift of God. In one sense the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the risen Jesus. The Holy Spirit is therefore poured out into our lives not to make up for the absence of the risen Lord but rather to confirm his presence. Christian theology teaches, therefore, that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are the gifts of the ascended (glorified) Jesus.

**Hebraic Context** - Jesus and his disciples attended the Passover festival in Jerusalem, one of the three pilgrim festivals commanded by God in the Torah. John’s Gospel puts Jesus in Jerusalem during two Passovers (John 2:13 and John 11:55). The temple was a powerful symbol of God’s presence among his people, of His abiding covenant and promises to Israel. Jesus had a high appreciation of the temple, calling it “his Father’s house,” and would often be found teaching in the courtyards. Following his resurrection, we find the apostles continue in their Master’s footsteps with daily meetings in the temple (Acts). However, the leadership of the temple had become corrupt. Worship of the Lord became entangled with the corruption of the money changers, a false Maccabean priesthood mingled with the descendants of Levi and Aaron, and there was poor scholarship and instruction from the shepherds of Israel. This had all moved away from the original intention of the temple, which was to be a place of worship and a house of prayer for all nations.

Humanity’s original purpose has always been to fellowship with and to worship the Lord. This is the context of the passion or zeal of Jesus. Notice how no one seems to stop him from clearing the temple. It is highly likely his passion was shared with many of the pilgrims who came truly and honestly to worship the Lord.

**ACNA Addendum**

**Romans 7:12-25** - Paul continues with his personal testimony and shows the struggles and grinding frustration of seeking to do what is right (based on a commitment to the gift of Torah) while being aware of the power and presence of sin. In this Paul shows us that there is a process at work – a process from justification through lifelong sanctification to the goal of holiness. However one may view or explain this process, the central reality is “Jesus Christ our Lord!” (v. 25).

**About the Authors**

The Rev. Alex Jacob is a United Reformed Church minister ordained in 1985. He led three church congregations in the UK before beginning ministry with CMJ in 2006. He is the CEO of CMJ UK and has pioneered key evangelism and advocacy work. He has written a range of theological and devotional books; the most recent is a commentary on Paul’s letter to the Romans. Alex holds a master of arts degree in pastoral theology and a master of philosophy research degree. His research interests focus on knowing Jesus in his Jewish context and the theology of election with reference to Romans 9-11. Alex

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