

Sunday, March 4, 2018

Exodus 20:1-17

John 2:13-22

Living in Community

Have you ever had one of those times when you had just had enough? One of those times that you have held your breath, you have turned away, maybe many times, because you just don't like what you see going on, but then finally come to the point that you just can't turn away again? You've had enough, and you decide you just can't be silent any longer. Maybe this has happened at home with family in the past, or maybe at work or even in situations within the church or other places where you were.

What had occurred? Usually the situation involves people who did something against the rules, the way things were supposed to be done or even against your wishes and desires. We often think of children who in many ways become creative with crayons or paints or even spaghetti sauce or cake batter that ends up everywhere. But these kinds of situations might also involve the children along with the dog or cat and what they are doing together—being in the mud, or even getting a bath! These situations might be where there is a difference of opinion and conversations were not clearly heard or understood. So what did you do? Some people might describe it by saying that there was an episode of anger with screaming and yelling. Other people might just say- they lost it! What was lost? Control and when we live with others there is often a a question of whether one is or is not in control especially when the leadership of the community is at stake as well as the community as a whole. Losing control is not something new but have existed as long as people are put together in community. The concern that we focus on today is how do we handle it? What helps us to do so or not!

We read the Ten Commandments as they had been given by God to Moses to share with the people. But copies were not quickly made and hung on the doors of the refrigerators of the people. In fact God ended up making a second copy of the tablets with the commandments on them. Moses led the people out of slavery and they were getting prepared to move into the Promised Land under his leadership. In Exodus 32 we read that while Moses was up the mountain with God and getting instruction about how to deal with the people. They were corrupt. They turned away from them and made a golden calf and had bowed down and worshiped it. God calls these people stiff necked and is very angry with them. In discussion with God, Moses as God's chosen leader of the people and this particular task, asks God to turn from his anger and don't destroy the people Moses reminds God about the covenants he made with Abraham, Isaac and Israel—to make their descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Moses then

goes down the mountain with the two tablets and when he approached the camp where the people were dancing and worshiping the golden calf. Moses lost it, too! He threw the tablets out of his hands and broken them into pieces at the foot of the mountain. He took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire and ground it to powder mixed it with water and made them drink it. Moses saw that they were running wild and were out of control. Moses was angry, God was angry and what were they going to do? God was about to give up on them but he punished them instead.

What happened when you lost it? Were the people around you scared or having too much fun to notice? Who was in or out of control? What did you do? Hit something or walk away, talk to someone or stop and pray.

Our gospel reading from John 2 is the story of Jesus at the synagogue. There is debate about when this story takes place in Jesus' life—whether it is early in his ministry as John places it or soon after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem where Matthew includes it. The question of when it occurred seems at odds because if Jesus had cleaned out the temple early in his ministry would this have been the reason that the chief priests, elders and teachers really watched him? Or did Jesus do this after his triumphal entry in order that people would recognize him for his actions.

According to John, it was getting close to the time of the Jewish Passover and as Jesus had only performed the miracle of the water to wine at a wedding in Cana he was not truly recognized yet in Jerusalem. At the temple courts Jesus sees men selling cattle, sheep and doves and others sitting at tables exchanging money. He knows that the animals and birds are for the people to sacrifice and that the money is special coins used to pay the temple tax which would be used for the upkeep of the synagogue. But what he sees is money- being made and sold, people being cheated and he grows angry. Jesus is upset because all this buying and selling has intruded upon the sacred space for worship. He sees many people coming into the temple and paying high prices for the sacrifices they need to make in order to be reconciled and forgiven by God. So what does he do? He then grabs some cords and makes a whip and drives out the people, the cattle and sheep and scatters the coins all over the place. The disciples witness this and remember what is written in Psalm 69—zeal for your house will consume me. Jesus is then questioned by the Jews as to what miraculous sign or by what authority he did this. They too become angry-but at Jesus!

Jesus is the son of God but they did not fully realize who he was and more so, why he was so angry at what was common practice in this place. Jesus was cleaning up the temple and he did so because this was wrong. According to John this was Jesus' first trip to the synagogue

in his ministry. Why would Jesus want to draw attention to himself in such a negative way? Wouldn't it have been more diplomatic and have caused fewer problems for him to sit down with the church leaders and discuss the problem? When are swift, harsh actions needed rather than diplomacy? Why did Jesus lose it?

Jesus knew his role as God's son and teacher. The disciples were still trying to figure him out as they watched him and worshiped him. But really led to Jesus lose it at the marketplace? Was it false expectations of what the synagogue should be like? Was it seeing the crowds and the potential money to be made taken out of the pockets of the faithful? Or was it because they did not know him, or his purpose yet?

Moses and Jesus became angry at the people who claimed to be believers of God. Those in the desert journey with Moses needed rules to live by and when they did not seem to come fast enough for them, they turned away from God. And so when Moses finally comes down from the mountain he is angry. Couldn't they have waited for the rules of how to live in community?

Jesus grew angry when he saw the marketplace of the temple grounds. People buying and selling and cheating others out of their money. He did not see people doing what the synagogue was built for- for the outside area of the temple was filled with animals and people were trying to buy/sell and receive money for these animals. Jesus' objection was that the temple was built for prayer and those inside could not carry this out as they would need money before they started to even do so.

So both Moses and Jesus do something fairly dramatic. Break the tablets and clean out the temple. Looking back on it, this might not have been the best reaction, but they had had enough and they did it. The next question to ask was: Were they wrong in their actions or right in what they did? This too has been debated. They were wrong to break the tablets, or overturn the tables but right in their convictions. Yet both show their faith in action. Standing up for what is right is not always easy but sometimes it is necessary

What about you? Do you remember one of those times when you lost it? What did you do as a response to what you saw others doing? Sometimes we do get angry and we want to break something or yell or vent. And sometimes you immediately just put up a wall and walk away and in these moments one might also state what you think and then bear the repercussions.

Was what you did wrong for the right reasons? Was this because you were in a role of leadership with others or was it at home and the frustrations of the day had gathered? As a parent or worker, leader or manager we must live in community. We each take on leadership

roles and when something is wrong, you no longer have the luxury of turning your head and looking the other direction. Leaders have to take responsibility for making things right, even when the task is unpleasant- And this is what Moses and Jesus did. They took the situation and told the people their wrongdoings. The Israelites were punished. Jesus was placed on the watch list.

As we continue in our Lenten journey we too will come into situations where we need to make confession of what we have done wrong in our past. But we need not fear the result because we are forgiven in Jesus' name. Above all Jesus came to bring us into community as one- the body of Christ- so much so that he wanted us to remember him and to tell his story again and again. But are we willing to do so?. As we continue in these days of Lent we too need to be strengthened for the days ahead. So let us reflect back on those moments when we have lost control and reacted in haste. What should we have done? Stopped, collected our thoughts and prayed. Some people might even count to 10 then pray for guidance and strength. Remember that when we confess our sins God hears us and we respond. Let us take this moment in silent prayer as we seek God's guidance and renew our faith. Amen.