

Sunday, March 7, 2021

Exodus 20: 1-17 John 2:13-22

Covenants and Commitments:  
“Covenant of Love: Enough is Enough”

How are you doing? This is a familiar question many are asking each other because we are continuing to live in these pandemic days and depending upon where you are, the ability to move and gather continues to fluctuate. In these last weeks I've heard many expressions in response to this general inquiry of care. Some responses have been- ok, fine, it is what it is, good, great, and even never been better. But there are also others who have said, I'm tired of this lack of freedom, staying at home, wearing a mask, I want something fun to do and see. There is a sense of anger, frustration and even a wondering of when will things be back to normal. The answer is that there will be a new normal post pandemic and vaccines. And this new normal is yet to be discovered or even glimpsed. We just don't know what the world will be like in the future days and months.

This uncertainty of life and how we will be able to live it reminds us of the Hebrew people who left slavery in Egypt and were preparing for the new life ahead of them in the Promised Land. Moses was leading these thousands of people and all their possessions through the desert at a snail's pace. Yet each day they made some progress to their destination. After weeks, months and years Moses observed much discontent on their faces and in their behaviour. At some point the malice and pain in their faces was evident and there was even a time when they wondered why they had even left Egypt. At least there, they had food, shelter and a purpose in life. Here in the desert there was uncertainty of the basic necessities and there was a lack of hope for the future. Moses reported this to God during his regular talks. God could see what was happening for himself as these His chosen people were not living as they ought. He then prepared the first tablets of stone as the people seemed not to have any cares in the world let alone the desire to live as God had wanted.

Moses and God were spending time up in the mountain and down in the valley the people were just living for the day and not thinking of the consequences of eating, drinking and doing what they thought best. They had lost their sense of self pride and were seeking answers to life's questions in idols and shared lies. God saw this and wanted this to end. God expressed the commandments by which the people were to live and love him and each other. Enough was enough, they needed to worship him, offer thanks to him, and to live loving others as he desired

them to do. They had forgotten the covenants of their ancestors—Noah, Abraham and Sarah and they needed to be reminded that they were still loved by God. They needed to know that they could live but they needed to live according God's standards and values. They needed the laws of God to follow.

When Moses was ready to deliver these commandments God told him what the people were doing. He was to deliver God's laws but he grew angry, dropped the stone tablets with God's commandments and walked away. He then went to the golden calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made them drink it. Moses had had enough. God had enough of the disobedience of the people as they had sinned against him. Moses then interceded for the people and because he had asked, God was with the people for the rest of the journey. Moses again went up to the mountain and God made a second set of the tablets with the commandments upon them. Moses had found favour in God's sight and the covenant God had made was renewed. The Covenant that the Hebrew people would live in a promised land.

One can only imagine how angry Moses was when he descended the mountain and saw a golden calf. In just a few days, we will mark the anniversary of the World Health Organization's declaration of a world pandemic. When this declaration was made, the world stopped- schools, businesses, flights, cruises, everything was stopped and people were expected to go home. Almost a year later and we have experienced so many losses—many people have died around the world, borders have been closed to essential workers, celebrations events concerts, dinners out and special occasions were cancelled or held in new and creative means. There are many who are angry that the people of the world have had to suffer these losses, changes, and wonder when things will be normal again. The frustrations, anger, disappointment, hurt and sense of unknown as lead to some people enough is enough. Let's get the world turning again. And there is hope—4 vaccines have now been approved for use in Canada. People are being vaccinated in different areas of the country, province based upon work they do and their ages. But we must remain diligent and stay safe. Yes there is something to be stated about enough being enough; but we must also remember how much people have endured in this last year. And then we must also think about what is to come—whatever the new normal will be, it will be new, changed, different than before. And it should be. We need to learn from what occurred and prevent this from happening again. We need to look at health care, education facilities, long term care homes as well as vulnerable peoples and the needs of all in order to prevent the spread of disease. Once the vaccines are distributed, it is a time to begin

anew phase of living; and to reassess what is important. And this includes not only what is needed for our physical well being, but who we are as people with a holistic approach to life.

We are in the season of Lent; a time often set aside to look at ourselves as individuals and what we have done and not done to live as Jesus taught. As Christians we believe that Jesus came to show us how to live the best lives we can and to understand who we are and can be as we serve others in faith and to offer hope. Jesus' way is to love others without counting the cost, to share compassion, to understand agape love and to follow God's teachings for a full life.

Passover is a major feast in the lives of Jewish people. Jesus went to Jerusalem and to the temple. And what he saw made him very angry. The kind gentle man who had performed the miracle at the wedding in Cana was now very upset and angry. There he saw people selling cattle, sheep, dove and the money changers seated at their tables. Taking cords, he made a whip and he drove all of them out- sheep, cattle, people. He overturned the tables and the coins went all over. He told those selling doves to get out. He also told them, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." Then the Jews asked, "What sign can you show us for doing this? In other words, why? Jesus had had enough. "Destroy this temple and in 3 days I will raise it up. They thought he meant the actual temple constructed over 46 years but he meant himself. Jesus knew that one day he would be killed. Cleaning up the temple was the first strike against him. But just how much was enough? What had angered Jesus so much?

In this story Jesus does what is necessary and yet he is asked to justify his actions by the Jewish leaders. Jesus did not like the temple court to be used as a marketplace. Yes, people needed to convert their own money to pay the temple tax when they entered but those running market stalls offering livestock for sacrifices were cheating the people and doing so in the name of the faith. Jesus had seen enough. He wanted the marketplace to stop.

When we consider the purpose of the gathering place where we worship we must remember that it is a place of prayer, a place of worship and a place where like minded people share in glorifying and honouring God. This is why these last months have been difficult for people who are used to coming into a church- they want to give praise to God and see their church family for whom they love and care. And Jesus knew this was true for the faithful Jewish people who came to pray. Yet the market place had gone to the extreme. Cattle and doves and sheep and other animals; the temple court would not have been clean by any means. Imagine going into any place in these sanitized germ free days and smelling animals of all sorts. What

was Jesus doing? Cleaning it up. He was interfering in what had become the normal to something that required change for all people free access to the place of prayer. He had seen enough.

As we mark the first year of the declaration of the pandemic, we must realize that we are still in the shadow of what has occurred. Yes there is hope because of the number of vaccines coming to Canada and to Canadians, but we must press on, be patient and do what is right. And doing right means caring for others by wearing masks, staying safe and staying home. For one day not so very far off, we will be able to establish new life. And when we do we need to recall what new life is about- new life in Christ Jesus, new life that is to be lived with compassion and hope. New life that is abundant and free because Jesus showed the depth of his love for us by dying on the cross. And through his love we will have enough to live life anew.

In the weeks to come we will hear again the story of Jesus passion which of course leads to his death on the cross. Yet there are still covenants to be explored and commitments to be renewed as we walk the way of Calvary to the cross of Christ. When Jesus cleared the temple he had seen enough and through his action, he calls us to take action against those who are oppressed, hurting and in need. We are called to bring justice to love kindness and to do what Jesus teaches- share and show compassion with- humility and hope.

Let us pray

God of grace we praise you and thank you for emotions that show us how to show others what we are feeling. Help us to express these matters in ways that help us to grow in faith and closer to each other. Remind us again of the covenants established between you and those of previous generations. Enable us to know in our hearts and minds that it is Jesus who leads our way. We ask this in His name. Amen.