

**Connection**  
**March 10, 2024**

**Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church**

**Pastor John Scott**

We have been talking about *Christ For You*, which is all about who Jesus is, what He has done for you, and who He has been for you. Today, you heard two scripture readings: one from Exodus, which describes the Ten Commandments. Maybe you have heard of those. It is possible if you are familiar with scripture or things or even current things in politics you have probably heard about the Ten Commandments. You heard a lot of ‘thou shalt not’s, right? *Thou shalt not..., thou shalt not..., thou shalt not....* There is a different way to look at that, and we are going to look at that in just a little bit. The second Scripture reading was Jesus going into the temple area and getting angry. It is one of the only instances that we see, in Scripture, of Jesus getting really angry. And while it is a really visceral image of Him turning over tables and doing all that, there is something else happening there that I want to focus on today, which actually is a little bit more revealing.

So, let us get into this now. We have talked about how Law and Gospel are two lenses through which we look at scripture and through which we look at our lives. Law is this idea that when we learn the “thou shalt not...” right? That *you shall not murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal...* Those become curbs upon which we should not cross. Like when you are driving in your car and when you hit a curb, the curbs are there to let you know when you are getting close to the side, that you should probably get back in the middle. These laws are kind of like curves. They will let you know that this is the boundary line of where you should be. So, stay close, stay in the middle. And when we transgress that, when we go over it, when we break that, that is the breaking of the law. In the

same way, when we break God's law, it shows us our sinfulness. It is like a mirror and a curb.

The gospel is the other side of that. It is when we experience that mirror and curb—when we realize that we are broken, that we are sinful, that we make mistakes, the gospel comes along and says, “Yes, you are that, but guess what else you are? You are mine.” This is what God says to you, that you are mine, that I love you. And that I sent Jesus to bring you back to me. You see, this Law and Gospel, this showing of our sins and our Savior, is God's plan to bring us back to Himself. This is what He uses to bring us back to Himself out of great love.

So today, the question that the leaders asked of Jesus is what sign do you show us for doing these things? So what did Jesus actually do? The temple in Jerusalem was a huge structure. It was in the center of everything. It was the center of worship. It was the center of life. And in the center of the temple was a place called the Holy of Holies, and that's where the presence of God in this physical world was located.

Think about that for a minute. God's physical presence in this world, the way He interacted with the world, was located in a place, at a time, in a space. And it was in that temple. And so when people came to worship, they were worshiping God and His presence among us, and they tried to get close to it. The temple had different layers, and you could get the closest to the Holy of Holies if you were a priest, and then moving outwardly, there was a court for the children of Israel, then an outer court for women, and still on the peripheral the court of the Gentiles, which was for the people who were not part of the faith or who were not part of the people of God, but who were interested, who wanted to investigate, who wanted to see what this was all about. And they could get close but not too close. This is where all of these tables and where all of this trade was happening.

It was taking up all the room in these outer courts. Jesus was not necessarily as concerned about money exchanging hands near the temple as He was all of the room being taken up for all of the people who were not yet connected to God to be close to Him. You see, the trouble here is not what you think of. If you have seen the different Jesus movies or shows, or *The Chosen*, which is the newest one out, you maybe have this image of Jesus just getting angry, turning over tables, things flying everywhere, money going everywhere, and animals, and with all kinds of noise. The real thing happening is what the leaders ask Him: “What sign do you have to show us that you have the authority to do this?” In other words, they were more interested in who told Jesus to do this. Where is the authority at? Is He a prophet maybe? Did God tell Him to do this? Is this a message from the Lord? This is what they were interested in because through this authority, this is how they wondered if they should believe.

What do the leaders need to believe that Jesus has authority over the temple? So what is the answer that Jesus gives? This is where we see very early on in John that Jesus has a plan—Jesus says, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Now you and I know that when we approach scripture if you have heard anything in scripture, you know that three days is a significant period of time. It is the same time in which it took Jesus to die on the cross and to rise again. It is the three days between Good Friday and Easter morning. But at this point in the story, nobody knows this yet. In fact, they cannot even fathom it. Nobody has ever been resurrected from the dead. They have no idea what He is saying.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” They think that He is going to somehow magically rebuild the temple when in fact, He is saying that the physical presence of God in the temple is changing its location. The presence of God, the place that you need to go to worship Him, the place that you need to go to experience God’s connection with you in your life, is changing.

No longer is it set deep within this physical structure in this temple. Now, it is going to be Jesus Himself. Where God is, is where Jesus is. From the beginning of His ministry, He went to people and said, “the kingdom of God is at hand.” When we all read that the first time in the Bible, and we wonder, what does that mean? I do not know what that means. And you start to grow, and you learn more about what that means, and it starts to make sense. Because what He is saying is that wherever I am, as I walk around, as I heal people, as I make the blind see and the deaf hear, I am making the kingdom of God happen around me. If you want to know where God is, if you want to be connected with Him, be close to me. That is why when people come up and touch His garments, they would instantly be healed. It was not because He performed some kind of magic. Jesus was the presence of God in the midst of the people.

So when He died and then rose again, He was showing them that the temple cannot be destroyed. The presence of God cannot be taken away from you because the presence of God is in Jesus. Now, think about this from the perspective of everybody else who had no idea that Easter was going to happen. We live on this side of Easter. We know that Easter is a historical fact. We know that it happened. But the disciples at this point in the story do not know that. The leaders in the temple do not know that. Nobody knows this yet. It is going to be a surprise for them, but Jesus keeps warning them and warning them. He keeps asking them to focus on Him instead of all the other things that they have built up around the kingdom of God.

And this is our task today. There are so many things that we have built up around our connection with God that we often wonder this: *How do I get this connection with God? How do I create this connection, this connection with God?* And there are lots of different answers out there, lots of different ways you can go about this.

The most popular one, the one that I hear most often, is simply, *I am going to try to do my best. I am going to try to do some good things. I am going to be kind to people. I am going to be kind to my neighbors. I am going to come to church. I am going to do all these things, and through that, I will be connected with God.*

So much so that kind of on the last day, we get this picture, which is kind of a normal idea of what people think about heaven. After we die, we end up before the Lord, and we are being judged. And we think, as long as I have done enough good stuff, more than the bad stuff, then I should be okay. Right? It is a common thing that you hear. If you have seen the TV show, *The Good Place*, it is a reminder of this idea that we all have in the back of our heads that if I am just a good enough person, then I will be connected with God, that God will love me, that He will accept me.

So much so that we think of stepping on this scale that weighs how good or bad we have been on Judgment Day, and the assistants bring out our files of all the things that we have done. And we have all the things we have done that are good in this hand, and all the things we have done bad in this hand, and we hope the file folder with the good stuff is bigger. Because if that is the case, then it will weigh out in our favor, and we have done more good than bad, and God will accept us.

Does anyone feel his file folder on the good side is bigger? Or on the bad side? Now, here is what I know about myself. I know that I have done many things that are good, and many things that are against God's law. But I also know that there are many things that I do not even know of that I have done that are against God's law. I know that I am not a perfect person. I am not even close to it. I have a feeling that I am not the only one in that position. I think that we are all kind of there, too. And the very question that we have, the very thought that we go to, which is thinking,

“If I can just do more good than bad...,” this already reminds us that we have done so much bad that we are worried about it.

We think, if we are on this meter that’s going to judge how much good we have, if we just outweigh the good with the bad, then we will be okay. And we know deep in our hearts that we can never get to that spot. So, we might be lost in despair, and we start asking this question again: *how can I be connected with God?* How can I just do more good stuff? How can I just be more connected with Him? And it is never enough. And you drive yourself into despair, trying to work your way into a connection with God when, in truth, in reality, He has already come to you and given you this connection. You see, the whole reason Jesus turned over the tables was not to show us how to do church, not to tell us we would never have tables up here; rather, it was to refocus our minds and our hearts on Him, to say that He is where the presence of God is. In Him, we find our connection. In Him, we find who we are. In the temple, God’s presence radiated His holiness, His perfection, over all the people and over all of the land.

We find this in Jesus. He comes to us and says, *I will be your holiness.* I will be your connection. I will be the one who stands on that scale for you with a file folder of all the good stuff and of zero bad stuff. I will be the one who does that for you. So it is like, put yourself back on that scale, looking at all the bad things that you have done and the good things and thinking you are never going to make it through when you feel a tap on your shoulder. You look behind you, and it is Jesus. And He gently, ever so gently, maybe a little forcefully, pushes you off the scale. And He says to the judges, “This person is with me.” And He steps on the scale instead. And when He does, His holiness, His perfection, takes your place. His holiness stands in for yours. And because He has paid for that, because He stands in our place, we are accepted. In the end, our file folders just get tossed aside. And it is all about Jesus. Jesus is the presence of God in our

midst, with us, for us. He is for us. He reconnects us to the Lord. He shows us this connection and gives it to us freely out of great love.

So what signs does Jesus use to show us all these things? We are in Lent, and Lent is taking us to one place and one place only. We are making our way to the Cross—the Cross is the sign that shows us that Jesus took our place, and on Easter morning, that empty tomb is the sign that shows us that it was all paid for and that the power of death is no more.

Jesus gives us life today and forever through that sign. A few chapters later, Jesus reminds them of the authority that He has. He says, look, I have been given authority from my father over my life, and I choose to lay it down for you. And I will choose to rise again victorious over all of the things that break you. I will give you what I have earned. I will give you what I deserve. Because I love you. Because you are mine.

When we go back to this question of how can I be connected with God, I encourage you, just as Jesus has done, to focus on Him. To focus on Him alone, to what He has done for us, because through that, through knowing that He is the one who gives us life, today and forever, He gives us purpose. He gives us direction. He gives us life itself.

We know that because Jesus has been raised from the dead, that we too will rise. Every week when we recite our creed, we talk about how we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, and we know that because Jesus has taken our place, paid for us, and given us life, that life is ours today and forever. So we point our eyes to that. We let everything else fall aside. And as we go through this life with all of its brokenness, with all of its suffering, with all of the twists and turns that are going to happen in our life still, we stay focused on Jesus. It is in Him that we find out who we are. Let us close in prayer.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for leading us and guiding us, that through your scripture you show us who we are, that we, yes, have sinned, that we have fallen short of your glory, that we have not been perfect and far from it. But you also show us and keep pointing us back to your goodness for us, the good news that Jesus has died and has been raised from the dead and gives us the victory that he has won.

He takes our place and reconnects us with you. So Lord, when we struggle, when we doubt, when we wonder, when we suffer, Point our eyes to you and you alone on your greatness and goodness for us, on the love that you give to us each and every day, and on your grace for us through Jesus. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.