

Lent 3 2021 7th March – Love and Awe

7 th March Lent 3	9.30 Holy Communion Cuxton 11.00 Holy Communion Halling	Exodus 20 vv 1-17 p77 I Corinthians 1 vv 18-25 p1144 John 2 vv 13-22 p1065
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WE beseech thee, Almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants, and stretch forth the right hand of thy Majesty, to be our defence against all our enemies; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent; Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we, worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen*

THE heavens declare the glory of God : and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

How often do we hear the Ten Commandments read out loud in church? They used to be read at every Communion service. After each of the first nine, the people would respond *Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.* After the tenth, the response is *Lord, have mercy upon us, and write all these thy laws in our hearts, we beseech thee.* Perhaps, when we hear them, we think of the original context in which they were delivered. After the Children of Israel had escaped from slavery in Egypt, they passed through the waters of the Red Sea and then God led them through the wilderness by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night to Mt Sinai. (Exodus 19³⁻⁶) *And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel;⁴ Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself.⁵ Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine:⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.* Can we just try to get into our heads how awesome all this is, how awful even? Imagine that we are among those Israelites, after all that we have been through, standing at the foot of the holy mountain hearing the words which God Himself has spoken to our leader Moses. *⁶ And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.⁷ And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him.⁸ And all the people answered together, and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord.*

Moses goes up into the mountain to speak with God. So holy is the mountain, that the people must sanctify themselves and wash their clothes. They are not to approach the mountain. Even their flocks and herds are not to graze on its slopes. The first ten words, the words we call the Ten Commandments, which God speaks to Moses, He speaks in a voice which carries to the people waiting down below. (20^{1&2}) *And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.* The Israelites are so overwhelmed that they move back even farther from the holy mountain. (20^{18&19}) *And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they*

removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, *Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.* Can we capture anything of that sense of awe? To be in the Presence of God, to see His mighty works, to be shown some small part of His Glory, to hear His Voice. The Law is a manifestation of God because God is love and the Summary of the Law is love. In fact, the Summary of the Law often takes the place of the Ten Commandments in our services of Holy Communion. (Matthew 23³⁵⁻⁴⁰): *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.* The Summary of the Law is not a taming or a domesticating of the Law. It could be abused in that way. It is shorter than the Commandments so we get home from church that much quicker! Gloriously non-specific, it could seem that it doesn't challenge us as much as does a detailed list of *Thou shalt not*s. "Of course we love our neighbours as ourselves, we might say," but how do we show that love? When we ask that question, we have to get specific. "What is it that I do that shows my neighbour that I love him? What do I refrain from doing because I love my neighbour?" "Of course I love God." Fair enough, but what difference does the fact that I love God make to the way I live my life? S John says: (I John 4^{20&21}): *If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.* He also says (3^{17&18}): *But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.* The Law expressed in summary is no less awesome than the Law expressed in the form of the Ten Commandments, inscribed on two stone tablets by God Himself and entrusted to Moses to deliver to the people of God. The supreme manifestation of the Law of Love is the one S Paul refers to in today's Epistle. *But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* For a few moments let that thought sink in. Standing before the Cross of Christ we enjoy an infinitely greater privilege than even the one which the Israelites experienced at the foot of Mt Sinai. Through Christ God says to people of all nations who believe in Him *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.* In today's Gospel, Jesus cleansed the Temple. *Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.* They didn't know what He meant, but we do. He spoke of His own Body which was crucified under Pontius Pilate and raised up on the third day. God's revelation of the perfect Law of Love in the Death of Jesus is awesome, even infinitely more so than the manifestation of the Law on Mt Sinai. St John again (I John 4⁹⁻¹²): *In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.*