

The View From The Woodshed

The 3rd Sunday of Lent sermon (Year B) presented by The Rev. Philip A. Rodgers
presented Sunday, March 4th, 2018 at Trinity United Church in Malton, related to John 2:13-25

The Text For The Sermon: *"Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle."* John 2:15a

Well there it is, the list of the Ten Commandments. I hear this list of commandments and I immediately feel guilty, the same feeling comes over me when I see a police car in my rear-view mirror. I'm a law-abiding driver, BUT when I see that cruiser....

Through these Commandments my guilt button is pushed and I wonder which side of God am I on. I try my hardest to be faithful but I also know I have not fully kept the commandments. Will God punish my children and my children's children for my sins?

I suppose there is a *Woodshed* in everyone's past. The woodshed is where the Ten Commandments send me, at least metaphorically. Because the woodshed is the proverbial place of discipline – where your grandfather supposedly took your father to teach him a thing or two – maybe even give him a lickin', as they used to say. The woodshed is the place where you have a chance to think about your sin and guilt, and there is nothing like your father standing there with a disappointed and angry look on his face to focus your mind. So thoughts from the woodshed are thoughts about sin and guilt and punishment – and an angry God.

One question that is always good to ask oneself in the woodshed is, *"Why am I here?"* These days I feel as if the whole world is in the woodshed, for this socio/economic crisis we find ourselves in feels like a swift spanking is due on our collective backside; and so now chastised we are finally beginning to ask ourselves, *"How did we get here?"* We don't need to wait for the third and the fourth generation for the visitation of our iniquities. They are bearing down on us like a freight train. Who was the guilty? In the woodshed you don't get to point fingers even when we sit in there together. It would be so easy to do this in this dire situation we're in, saying it was television, women wishing to freely pursue their own interests in the workforce, birth-control, computers, cellphones, (you can throw in other contemporary social issues you would like – all contributing not just to the breakdown of the family but to the breakdown of the entire social fabric that was holding us together). But in the end the answer to *"Who was the guilty?"* is again we are the guilty, we bought into the culture of anything goes, both literally and figuratively.

We are not used to facing our guilt. In the culture that refuses to make hard choices, the last thing anyone wants to take is responsibility. We want it all – except responsibility. Guilt is way out of fashion. Guilt is a useless emotion, a waste of energy. When the goal is how can I get more and more for me and mine, just how many more "selfies" can I get on my smart phone, (how many more can I stand before I get sick of myself?), guilt gets in the way.

In the woodshed I have had time to have a moral compass to guide your actions. To have guilt is to have empathy for your fellow human being – to feel with them as you interact with them. Guilt is a good motivator. It helps us do the right thing. Having guilt is to remember that our sins can make others angry, even God.

In the era of anything goes, we did our best to forget that God can get angry. We did our best to look away when God's face became the least bit clouded and preached with all our might that God is love. Well God is love and loves us enough to get angry with us when we are bent toward self-destruction. God is love and loves us enough to say that we will end up bankrupt if we co-opt everything for our own consumption, if every system is designed to enrich us. We will end up devastated if our world is

built on having more and more – consuming more and more – using more and more. God does not even have to punish us. The natural consequences of unsustainable greed will do the punishing, and those consequences are being visited upon us and will be visited upon the third and fourth generation: poverty, homelessness, unemployment, the destruction of our environment and war.

We are not used to an angry God, but sitting in the woodshed, we are forced to face God's anger squarely. We do not like to think about an angry God, so when we hear in our Gospel lesson for today that Jesus got angry enough to push some people around we don't know quite what to think. What fueled Jesus anger as he burst into the temple upsetting the piles of money sitting on the money-changers' table – what made Jesus just hopping mad – was that we have the audacity to use for our own gain the very means God had provided for our atonement.

Jesus had to tear down this temple. Jesus had to upset this system that put the forgiveness of sins at the service of making money. Jesus said, "*Tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days.*" The temple Jesus would rebuild in three days is the temple of his body. The temple he was destroying .as it the temple of selfishness or the temple of greed. Jesus came to not just destroy the temples we build to serve ourselves but to raise up a new temple for us, a temple in which we can truly be reconciled to God. Every temple made with human hands, every system we attempt to construct, will end up only serving ourselves, it appears. In Jesus, God offers us a temple where we can receive the forgiveness of sin without cost, where we can be reconciled to God without trying to make a buck, where we can worship the one true God and be free from our bondage to greed and self-service. In our baptism, we enter this temple, becoming one with the body of Christ, living in the temple of God's love and forgiveness forever.

In the woodshed, some things become clear. God is a jealous God, jealous for our own good. God wants us to serve God alone, not serve ourselves. God wants us to worship God alone, not worship the almighty dollar. God wants us to dwell in the temple of his love and forgiveness, not to be banished to the woodshed. Jesus invites us out of the woodshed, out of our abode of sin and guilt, to abide with him in the temple of his body which he offers for us on the cross, a body to which we are joined in our baptism, a body in which we, by the grace of God's love for us, will dwell forever.

AMEN.