

“God’s House Is a Very, Very, Very Fine House”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

March 7, 2021 – Third Sunday in Lent

Psalm 19; John 2:13-22

In today’s reading from the Psalms, we heard about how God has been revealed, and that there is a celebration of that revelation. The first half of the psalm that Donna read talks about how God is revealed through the sky and the rest of creation under it. This is what theologians refer to as general revelation. Through the good world that is around us, the sun that is above us, and the reason that is within us, we can understand much about the creator and what it is to be a creature of God.

Unlike the worship of many of the people who lived around Israel that did worship the sun as a god, the people of Israel did not. However, they did recognize the sun as offering a message about God, something like a blazing, gaseous spokesperson (spokesobject, really). And this object speaks very loudly and clearly about God. It shouts a message of joy that God loves us and wants us to enjoy the blessings of warmth and life.

The second half of the psalm shifts abruptly to a celebration of a different kind of revelation, a kind that theologians refer to as a special revelation. In particular, it celebrates the revelation that God has offered us in the Torah, which is translated as law, referring to the Ten Commandments and the rest of the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures. The psalmist celebrates the law, because its good words are something like the bright sun -- a source of warmth and a source of life that blesses us when we follow its instruction.

From a Christian perspective, we believe that God's revelation has come to us specially in the person of Jesus, who was the Divine among us. Through Christ, God revealed God's character and the laws or rules for life that we ought to follow ourselves.

We as followers of Christ believe that God's revelation did not end with the incarnation, but still continues. Everywhere where God dwells, God is still being revealed. But where is God's house--the dwelling place of God? In the Temple? Perhaps the church is God's house? I remember when I was a child, I was taught over and over and over again by the diligent, kind, but very firm Mrs. Murray that the church was the House of the Lord, and that there was to be no running or in God's house! (I admit that I broke that rule more times than I can possibly remember, and I suffered the wrath of Mrs. Murray more than I can possibly forget). Well, the dwelling place of God is not just in the temple or a church, but it's found throughout all creation. God's temple is everywhere and beyond all of creation.

And we believe that through the Holy Spirit, our lives are all special rooms within God's dwelling place. This is something we celebrate every time we gather to partake of the sacrament of communion with one another. We take in the body of Christ as a symbolic meal. And just as you are what you eat, we take in the body of Christ to remind ourselves that we are the body of Christ, a living house of God, here to do God's work, to follow God's laws, and to bring blessing to the world around us.

Yes, we are the living house of God, and like any household, God's house has rules. The part of God's house that is the sky has a rule that the sun will run its course from one side to the other without fail. The sun follows that law very well.

We were also given household rules in the Torah and in its Ten Commandments (which was one of our lectionary readings for today, but since we read it in October, I figured we'd go with the psalm reading instead). And Jesus summed up the Ten Commandments and all of the Torah with the very simply stated, highest rules of the house: Love God and love your neighbor.

These are the rules of God's household that we need to follow this day and every day. Love God and love others. So let these rules, love of God and neighbor, rule you above all other rules. If we do this--all of us together in this house of faith with the rest of God's house throughout the world—God's house will become much more of a very, very, very fine house. It will be a more beautiful and more blessed house, where God's glory is revealed all the more. May it be so for us and in our world this day. Amen.