

Matins Oct 8, 2017 John Peters

Texts. Ps. 19, Ex. 20:1-4, 7-9, 12-20, Phil. 3:4b-14, Matt. 21:33-46.

Meditation verse. No other gods before me ... Keep the Sabbath ... Do no covet. Ex. 20.3,8,17. In Bryan Moyer Suderman's first session of Reading Jesus in the Bible, he said it was common for the rabbi to leave the audience with, "Think on these things." "Ponder these things." The same thought lingers with us this morning. Rather than leave dogma, we will seriously ponder our Christian behaviour today!

I see myself as one of the disciples, who has heard and read Jesus' words for many, many years, in many social settings, yet we have not grasped the full meaning of God's kingdom, of Jesus' imminent death in Jesus' day, of His suffering, nor of God's presence in me or within the church.

Ps. 19 gives us two themes which are clear: First, creation talks. Creation speaks loudly, speaks of God. It was all good. In this sanctuary we frequently hear words of gratitude to God for sunshine, for warmth, for the continual flow of water in our streams, for rain! We speak of God, in Whom we delight, as we gaze above the trees to the clouds and blue sky to the sinking sun in the west. What clear words for anyone teaching biology, physics or chemistry in our school system, private or government. God is evident. The Psalm continues, now with WORDS, God's words. God's words are right, true, clear, sure and perfect.

It is an easy flow, to then make the transfer to Ex. 20. God has words. When one makes reference to the ten commandments, many of us might think, "This is the **law**. We are way passed this. We are free." Yet, these words are for us today, and are highly relevant. May we ponder them. The WORDS are clear, NO OTHER GODS, only GOD. And from the time of Moses on, we hear the call- ONLY GOD. No substitute. We read on. KEEP THE SABBATH. In this post-modern era, as a busy family with sports and dance and TV we encounter tough competition. Ponder that one. A third word: DO NOT COVET. One might wish to paraphrase this, using your own words. What would you write from the text, as slave, ox, donkey no longer apply? Here is my attempt. Covet nothing of your neighbour's: lawn, flower garden, house, skill in food preparation, car, your fellow student or fellow employee's education, jewels, income, appearance. In my church community I am not to covet a fellow member's beautiful singing, her playing a musical instrument, her ease at public speaking. Covet **Nothing**.

For a month I thought of the texts for this Sunday, and found them extremely complex and disorienting. Tuesday morning I awake and saw clearly, the texts are easy. Three lessons to ponder. None are complicated! Give possible thought to rereading these texts this afternoon or evening- and for more than five minutes.

The Exodus passage concludes with the Moses people expressing their fear of God. They beg Moses himself to converse with God. But we are to fear God. This God is much more than a Friend. This God is to be feared, revered, respected, honoured, is to be recognized as our rabbi. At times this relationship should make me tremble, cause me to shake.

Now to Paul's writings to the Philippian church. He considers the church people to be his friends. Paul does not reprimand. He wants them to be TRUE to Jesus' teaching. He is in prison, a place he has been many times. This time he is likely not chained. There is a guard nearby. He does not speak of loneliness, of sanitary conditions, or of food. Most of us would have.

His words reflect on his past, when he was a "good" religious person. None of us here, on a

human level, stands anywhere close to Paul, with one exception. We have more possessions. Paul had so much in education, self-confidence, the best in religion- to the point of killing Jesus believers. I had just a glimpse of this condition in Ethiopia. The Orthodox bishop and priests literally urged people to release, to fire any employee who was an evangelical. They encouraged the people to throw rocks to smash and wreck the roof and windows of the believers' homes. This is truth. These are the Pauls in Pharisee garb in 2017. This still disturbs me.

The passage concludes with Paul speaking of striving, straining, pressing, to hold fast to... This striving and pressing is because of a right way of living he found in God. Paul finds this solely in Christ. In Christ's resurrection! In the power of the resurrection! Paul wants to be associated with His death. Paul chooses to engage in HIS suffering. Paul strives. I personally get such a mental and spiritual urge every return I make from a few weeks in Ethiopia! I must not forget. I cannot forget.

Let us put all of this in context. For years I have sat in the pews before Matins services and gazed at the cross, thanking God for my redemption. That large wooden cross is a symbol of the cost of my sin for God. Today I see it as much more. I am to carry that cross. I can readily see that this cross is related to why I reach out to help the poor, reach out to the stranger, the immigrant, the lonely, the sick. Let us go beyond such Mennonite thinking. Where and when might I bear this cross in this post-modern world? What about my conversation of God to my family and friends? I dare to give a small example. When my neighbour or fellow employee swears, using God's name in vane, am I silent? Is there some way to counter this slam, this evil use of English. Might I respond with: "You just hurt me." "That Christ is my Leader. I personally spoke with Christ this morning. I am unable to use Christ's name that way." Ponder these things!

In summary, four things : **No other gods. Keep the Sabbath. Do not covet. Suffer for the sake of Christ!** Ponder these words throughout this Sabbath. Amen.