**Gospel**: John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” 17His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” 18The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” 19Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” 21But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

**Message**: **Worship or Ritual**

 We in North America do not like to be **commanded** to do anything. Being commanded smacks of throwbacks to absolute monarchies or totalitarian dictatorships in which one can be punished on a whim for the slightest infraction of royal edicts. Moses received 10 commandments from God at Mt. Sinai. God is not being a tyrant or autocratic king; rather God is laying out an order and structure for human life to be lived out before God, who is merciful and just. Living in this manner brings blessing and harmony within a community. Living outside of these commandments has its own consequences. The first 5 deal with relationship between God and humans. The second 5 are for human to human relationships, all of which circle around to the first 5 which deal with love of God which leads to love of neighbor. As we have been taught, God is Love, and Love is God.

 Bernard of Clairvaux, 1090-1152 CE, after contemplation and meditation suggests there are four degrees of Love. The first is love of **self** for **self’s** sake. This may be from a purely survival point of view, but when one cares sufficiently for personal well-being and health, life is enjoyable. It could also be that teenager asserting the impending adulthood independence. “Do I have to?” Parents and/or God respond with, “Yes, it’s good for you.” However, when/if love of self leads to excessive pleasure, *that* becomes lust. Temperate self love is important as that love transcends to loving one’s neighbor as yourself, therefore keeping lust in check. One learns to care more for others and their needs. One can only purely love the neighbor if God is seen as the root of that love. You may not **like** your neighbor and all the warts that go with him/her, but God must be loved first in order to love the neighbor. When/if that neighbor is in need, the smallest gesture of kindness can make a great difference.

 The second degree of Love is love of **God** for **Self’s** sake. Always and everywhere, God is good and is to be loved. Yes, there are very practical reasons for loving God for self’s sake. God (like the caring parent) blesses and provides food, clothing, shelter, and protection. As one learns to trust and love parents, one learns that God works through parents and other people to bless and provide. There are also those “foxhole” moments when God somehow gets you through a great crisis or two. We learn that God brings together what we might call *circumstance*, that is to our benefit. We learn to love God for what God does.

 The third degree of love is love of **God** for **God’s** sake. If/when there is continued strife or situations great or small, God rescues us time and time again. Or, if a particularly difficult situation is ongoing or chronic for a tremendous length of time, you continuously go to God with your needs, cares and concerns; you recognize God’s presence in your life and in activities surrounding the crisis giving you strength and courage, wisdom and grace throughout the crisis, often seeing some ease. You go to God expressing gratitude and love. In all of that, you learn to love God not out of necessity, but for the sweetness of God alone—God who is Love. In this love of God for God’s sake, love of neighbor becomes easier and more natural. Love is no longer just in word, but is also included in thoughts, actions and deeds. God **is** good. God **is** Love.

 The fourth degree of Love is Love of **Self** for **God’s** sake. Blessed are we who experience this, wherein we love ourselves for God’s sake. This love takes us to a different dimension. Paul spoke of it when he said he on an occasion ascended to the highest heaven. Such experiences are rare (if at all) and come only for a moment. In a manner of speaking, we lose ourselves as though we did not exist, utterly unconscious of ourselves and **emptied** of ourselves. We become one mind, one will with God. (Putting a drop of water into a glass of wine, we lose our identity in God and God’s Love, yet our identity retains our personal uniqueness for God’s sake.) We might use the term “ecstasy.” To then return to “this world”--our mortal state—causes a sense of pain. As John Wesley stated, “We go on to perfection” in heart, mind, body and soul. Having had a glimpse, a moment, gives us the encouragement to no longer attend specifically to self needs; we are confident that God, who loves us, directs our life and provides. We come to God again and again in the sweet familiarity of Love.

 Jesus, to my thinking, was continuously in this 4th degree while, at the same time, navigating within the world of humanity. He told Philip, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.” To another, “I and the Father are one.” Jesus **is** one mind, one spirit, one will with God. “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (That drop of water in the glass of wine). He is filled to overflowing with the centrality of Love, the fullness of God, and he continuously lived God. Jesus fully embodies the Love that IS God. He personally felt the pain and suffering of others. He was angry at his fellow Jews, the religious elders, who **knew** the commandments, who **knew** what God requires and desires for us, but used them to extort riches and exploit the humble masses for their own purposes of lust of self for self’s sake. The corrupt system of sellers and priests in the temple enraged Jesus. Forgiveness does not cost money that impoverishes the penitent (the one seeking forgiveness), the one who comes to God of personal volition, not in an attitude of “do I have to?” Forgiveness **does** have a cost: we give our self back to God because we want to, because we Love God for God’s sake.

 Life’s power is in the blood. A life is given to sustain another life. Rather than animal sacrifice, Jesus said, “Take **my** blood. **I** give it for **you**” —His blood, through which the very power, the very essence of God flows. There are rituals and ceremonies that are orchestrated to bring greater awareness of God and God’s presence. Rituals of baptisms, memorials, special days, and, especially, Holy Communion are designed to bring us closer to God, to further reveal God, to have a greater understanding (as much as humanly possible) of God, to have **that moment** with God. We do not pay money to be baptized or to take the bread and wine. Often, though, we **do not pay** attention to the words and what is truly occurring during our rituals and celebrations. There is no specific or correct way to enact any of these rituals as long as what we do, say and think bring glory to God. We come before God in **awe** acknowledging that we are but dust, albeit God’s beloved dust. We come before God in gratitude, not just for what God has **done** for us, but for who God **IS** for us. We come before God praising God for loving us so dearly that God sacrificed God’s self in Jesus Christ that we might live in God and God in us in the fullness of **Joy**. We come to God in the fullness of worship, then to return to the world proclaiming the Love of restored and reconciled Self for God’s sake. Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Prayers of the People**: Holy and everlasting God, we may not feel the pain of those whom we have lifted to you this day, those in our hearts, but we have felt pain and have suffered. We ask you to work through us, through your children with particular gifts for healing, comfort, relief. We ask that you bypass us for a miracle that glorifies your Divine Presence. We rejoice in your Presence and in your Goodness, grateful that you continue to strive with us and grace us with every good gift that we may be Christ to many in every moment. Amen.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**: Through the depths of your Divine Love we receive unfathomable grace. Through these feeble gifts we offer to you this day, grace them with your power so that you are revealed to others and their hearts and minds are transformed in Christ our Lord. Amen

**Benediction**: The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and in Jesus, the Son our Lord. May the blessings of God Almighty, Christ the Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**Old Testament**: Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words: 2I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3you shall have no other gods before me. 4You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, 6but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. 7You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. 8Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. 9Six days you shall labor and do all your work. 10But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. 11For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

12Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. 13You shall not murder. 14You shall not commit adultery. 15You shall not steal. 16You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.
**New Testament**: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” 20Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.