

Trinity Church in the City of Boston
Third Sunday in Lent
Year B, 2024

[Exodus 20:1-17](#)

[John 2:13-22](#)

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

*God who loves us enough to call us to stop where we are
Invites us to see a new way
Stay with us in our baby steps
In our efforts that fall short
Delight in us as we awake each day and start new
To seek you in all that we do.
Amen.*

What do you do when you encounter a stop sign in your path.
I am talking about a physical, literal, stop sign.
Does it depend on the time of day?
Does it depend on the amount of traffic

Does it depend who is in the car?

Does it depend on

It's funny. The Sign is clear.

Red. Octagonal.

One Word.

Stop.

What did they do before Stop Signs were invented? Well, clearly, whatever they were doing for traffic patterns, it didn't work. It is mostly agreed upon that the first Stop sign was created in 1915 in Detroit Michigan at a particularly dangerous intersection and the rest is history!¹ Helping us get safely to and fro in the midst of more and more people hustling and bustling to and fro.

In the season of Lent we often stop certain habits. We shift in liturgy our pattern, we stop doing certain things all together. (Like saying the "A....." word.) We shift so that we might stop and be present. Each change in liturgy invites us to an opportunity to look around, see those around us, be reminded that stopping is in fact good for us so to do (One could say even A good and joyful thing even!)

While we have seen and heard of Lent being a time of giving up and going without, the things we adopt as habits should actually help us pause for seeing and seeking God's presence and assurance in our community. The church has been "doing this" thing called Lent for quite some time- not to be glum and dour for 40 days, rather to call us back into focus on God. Like going to the eye doctor once a year, the practice of Lent draws us back into the stories of God's covenant with God's people, refocusing our minds, bodies, and souls.

In our reading from Exodus today, we hear the first time that the 10 commandments are given to the people of God. God gives these "laws" for several reasons.

Clearly things weren't working. The Hebrews were in their early days of the wilderness and they were tired, frustrated and crying out "how long"-

How long do I have to travel, moving about,
How long is Moses going to be in charge,
How long do I have to travel with these people?
How Long?

And God, in God's own beloved way, answers how long?
with "This is how"

God's beloved people.

Focus on me.

Love me and no one else.

AND

Love one another.

This is how.

Care for your neighbor by not lying, cheating, murdering, stealing.

Full STOP.

Care for each other by delighting in what you have and live in relationships that honor each other (do not fracture relationships by desiring or acting on those desires of someone else's life)

AND

Make time to delight and rest.

Do not let the world win, consume you, devour you.

AND

I will be right here with you.

These laws are different than anything that the Hebrews had experienced before. Remember in Egypt, they had to conform to all things, had no choice and were conscribed to produce, produce in the Egyptian world of slavery.

God says to them, you are free from that life.

You are not Pharoah's, you never were.
You are my beloved.
Listen to my love, make space for my love and love those around
you.....
These commandments show you how.
How long? say the Hebrews (And Moses, too!)
For as long as you have, my loves- God Says.
I will show you the way.

Stop.
You are exhausted, worn out, tired, irritated.
You are acting in anger, pain and brokenness.
And God says to your exhaustion and pain-
You are still mine, beloved.
Be Loved.
AND
Be Loving.
Repeat.

The Artist Pink sings in her song "Love me Anyway"ⁱⁱ
Could you? (Could you still love me?)
Could you? (Pick up the pieces of me?)

*Could you? (Could you still love me?)
Could you love me anyway?*

The words sing of a person's own lament about mistakes in their relationship, a desire to be loved questioning if it is possible for such a love to be possible with all of one's short comings. To even all of these, God says Yes.

Which brings us to today's Gospel reading.
Jesus in the temple.

The Faithful no longer wander.
NO longer are they toting the Ark of the Covenant with them.
The faithful have settled in and built a temple.
Laws have multiplied, codified, penalized.
Systems have been established and in the midst of all of this world.
Jesus appears and says
Stop.

I want to pause right here for a moment to remind us that we have jumped from our continuous reading of the Gospel of Mark to reading the Gospel of John. And while all four gospels include the moment of Jesus in the temple, John is different.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke- Jesus appears in the temple in his final chapters as he nears the end of his earthly life. Trashing the Temple is full of passion and anger and culmination of three years of ministry as Jesus sees his time as short. The story is read and heard differently than today's.

In John, however, this instance takes place in Chapter 2. John writes full of signs of Jesus's ministry. THIS is the second sign (Wedding of Cana precedes this sign as the first) and first public act of ministry.

Jesus calls for people to STOP.

In a space where one was called to worship, glorify and re-focus on God, the people needed to realize there is a new thing occurring.

Making a whip out of cords (there were no weapons in the temple, he improvised!) Jesus called people's attention to stop what they were doing to hear this new thing.

A system change

A new identity

God's faithfulness, promise and presence outpoured to and with them.

Even if they thought they had it right
Even if they were getting it all wrong
Even if each day they were going to fail.

Jesus says to them:
Here I am.
Here is God
Here is something new
A new Identity

Stop.
Listen
You are my beloved
Be Loved
Change your ways and listen

Be restored
And be restorers, just as I will restore you to fullness "of life"

Jesus meets the people where they are and invited them into a new way.

A way of life that re-focuses attention on who God is.

A way of life that will transform

A new way of the same deep love that God has for God's People.

Even if we fail.

Even if we fall short

Even if we do not realize the pain we have caused.

God loves us through these moments and calls us into the struggle of community.

In this Lent,

Could you find time to Stop

Could you take time to see where God might be interrupting your systems?

Could you listen more deeply?

Could you love more deeply

Could you have more compassion with those who frustrate you?

Could you learn a new language of love to be in community?

Could you lean more into the being with together?

God invites you with wide open arms,

just like God does with the Hebrews in the wilderness,
just like the people in the temple,
just like those listening the book of John for the first time.

Beloveds, be loved and in turn love deeply.

ⁱ First [Stop Sign....](#)

ⁱⁱ The [full lyrics](#)