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LENT 3B

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A short act of worship for use in peoples homes while churches are closed.

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Methodist Women
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Call to worship

Some words from Michael Card's song 'God's Own Fool', to begin our worship:

"When we in our foolishness thought we were wise he played the fool and He opened our eyes... And so we follow God's own fool for only the foolish can tell – Believe the unbelievable and come be a fool as well."

Hymn: 317 STF – At the name of Jesus - [YouTube](#)

Opening Prayers

Holy God, we worship you.

[Pause].

Lord of all time and space,
as we come together in worship,
we see the work of your hands
revealed in the myriad of creation.

We see your mark on all that is around us,
we hear your voice throughout all the earth,
and feel your gracious touch.

You refresh our souls with justice and truth
you bring joy into our hearts
and inspire life and light,
through your enduring and abiding presence.

Holy God, I worship you.

[Pause].

I open myself to you.

Forgive my hidden faults,
help me to be all you ask of me.

May these words of my mouth
and this meditation of my heart,
be pleasing in your sight,

Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Amen.¹

¹ Opening prayers written by Patrick Stonehewer

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Exodus 20:1-17 - [Click for Reading](#)

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 - [Click for Reading](#)

John 2:13-22 - [Click for Reading](#)

Reflections on the readings

If you are aged somewhere between 35 and 60 (or have children or parents who are) you may be familiar with the children's television programme 'Play School'. A favourite part of every episode was when the presenter would ask, 'Which window are we going to go through today?' and our little black and white television screens would show three huge windows, the Round Window, the Arched Window and the Square Window. At this point, eager children sitting cross-legged on the carpet at home would shout out their hope – before the presenter for the day made the choice and took us into an exciting story through one or other of these windows.

Sometimes looking at the Bible story reminds me of the Play School windows, especially when, as today, the passages chosen in the lectionary seem to be quite different shapes and give quite different ways of seeing God and our relationship with God.

The passage in Exodus in which Moses receives the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai highlights the role of law in building our relationship with God. The Israelites, travelling as a migrant, nomadic community through wilderness terrain for forty years, needed some guidelines about how to live with each other and how to relate to God. The Ten Commandments are still well known – the fact of them anyway, if not the content – and have formed the basis for civil law as well as religious practice in many parts of the world for millennia. In a relatively short passage they cover much of human behaviour, from the call to put God first and foremost in our lives to a reminder not to look with longing on the brand-new hybrid car our neighbour has just purchased. In between they touch upon idolatry, blasphemy, work-life balance, family relationships, human rights and justice – quite an undertaking!

And wisdom is the shape of our next window onto God. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians wants them to understand that the human philosophies which were prized so highly by these early Greek Christians are not, ultimately, the way in which God is revealed or encountered. In fact, much of what God has done might appear to be folly compared with human wisdom.

Years ago, I found the perfect birthday card for my then-18-year-old son, Tim; amidst a cleverly drawn image were the words: 'Teenagers: Are you tired of being harassed

by your stupid parents? Act now, move out, get a job and pay your own bills – now, while you still know everything.’

‘Now, while you still know everything’... remember that phase of life? Or perhaps you haven’t reached it yet? Thankfully it is usually short-lived and we spend the remainder of our lives realising how little we really know; how foolish we are. Yet, Paul seems to be saying, foolishness will bring us closer to the heart of God than wisdom can – certainly than what the world recognises as wisdom. He disparages all that his culture might value so highly and instead nails his colours to an absurd mast – the wooden cross of a criminal. Paul himself realises that this will be ‘a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles’. Surely it is foolishness to trust in such weakness, yet this is the road to which Paul points and to which Christ calls. In church life today, we often bewail our insignificance in society, our weakness, our lack of power or status. Perhaps these are the very qualities that will allow the power of Christ and the wisdom of God to be seen.

So, having glimpsed something of the gift of God’s law through the Square Window and the upside-down nature of Christ’s wisdom through the Round Window, come with me and gaze through the Arched Window to see some action; what is Jesus up to in today’s Gospel passage from John chapter 2.

Jesus is in the capital; a travelling preacher from the north hitting the big city, and not in the low season, but at the very height of the high season – it’s almost Passover time and any Jew from anywhere in the world who has the means and the freedom to travel will want to be in Jerusalem. It is crowded. That is still true today; in 2017, when we took travel around the world for granted, I was in Jerusalem at Passover, which was also Holy Week. It was absolutely packed; we were shoulder to shoulder in the narrow market streets and around the holy sites. A cacophony of noise at the Western Wall as 100,000 Jews gathered for the Priestly blessing and to add their prayers to the prayers of the centuries, lamenting the lost Temple.

In our reading, it was in that precise location, the courtyards of the Jerusalem temple, that Jesus met a spectacle which stirred him to violent anger. The very place where God was understood to dwell, where compassion was embodied, where justice was palpable, where worship was primary, in that very place God had been usurped by trading, self-interest, exploitation and commerce.

Where was the recognition of the holiness of God which Moses and the Israelites had experienced on the mountain? Where was the observation of the law of God with its clear directives to put God first and not to steal? Where was any understanding of the wisdom of God being something totally counter-cultural? All absent as the various traditions and expectations around this most holy season of Passover were twisted into a market-place of profit and consumerism. (We may not have to look too far back into last year’s diary to see something similar today!)

There is a warning here not to be sucked into the market economy of our society, but to be consumed instead with zeal for the dwelling place of God. Not a building now - for Jesus has promised that the Spirit of God lives within us – so our zeal, our enthusiasm, is for hosting and revealing the presence of God in our very selves, in our congregations, in our communities, in our world.

In these days of restricted travel and gathering, many of us have spent a great deal of time indoors, perhaps trying to find new views from our windows to stretch our horizons as much as we can. Let's do that today, let's be drawn to these different, inviting, elegant windows of our Bible passages to gaze and gaze and gaze again on the glory of God made known in transformative law, in a foolish kind of wisdom and in radical action.²

What are you being called to?

[You may wish to use the [Vine Video at this point in the service](#)]

A quote from the Franciscan writer, Richard Rohr: "Ultimately our vocation is to become ourselves, in the thousand thousand variants we are."

[Pause]

Two questions for you to consider:

- What do I think church is for?
- How would I like to be part of that?

Let us pray.

Creator God,

We are all created uniquely, in the thousand, thousand variants that we are – I thank you for the gifts and graces you have given to me. As a community, we thank you for our variety and the different gifts and graces we have between us.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

God of compassion, we offer thanks for your goodness and for your blessings.

Seeing injustice, we pray

- for those crying in despair;
- for the continually hungry;
- for those 'let down by the system';
- for your guidance for those who hold authority.

² Reflection written by Jill Baker

Walking alongside, we pray
- with those enduring pain;
- with victims of violence;
- with people in dark places;
- help us to show empathy and understanding.

Offering hands of blessing, we pray
- over those in pain;
- over relationships at breaking point;
- over those who weep in grief;
- for courage to bless our homes and communities with your love.

Strengthen us to be who we are in you,
and to show your light in all that we do
so that your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

We pray these and all our prayers in the name of Jesus. Amen.³

Hymn: 547 STF – Beyond these walls of worship - [YouTube](#)

Blessing

Holy God, you are mine and I am yours,
Each one of us is loved and accepted into your family, just as we are.
Remind us of this truth as we travel through the week ahead,
That we might be inspired and encouraged by your love for us.

Amen.⁴

³ Prayers of intercession written by Patrick Stonehewer

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker