

## 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021 Third Sunday in Lent

### Readings

Exodus 20: 1 - 17

Psalm 19

1 Corinthians 1: 18 – 25

John 2: 13 – 22



### Normal ?

'Normal' is a much used word at the moment – *'When we get back to normal'* and usually answered by, *'What's Normal?'*

The scripture readings this week give a clear guide to how we may answer that question. They begin with Exodus and the Ten Commandments. After thousands of years these words given by God to Moses for His people and similarly used by different peoples of other races and faiths, are still the basis for true society. They are a sure guide for peaceful and successful living together.

It could be a good Lent exercise to spend some time thinking about them. We will not be surprised to learn that they are not always the foundation stones of our social and political life today, especially when we take into account Jesus' wider view of them. He said, for example *'to be consumed with anger against someone is not far removed from murder; neither is lust from adultery!'* (Matthew 5: 21, 27).

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of keeping mutually accepted codes for behaviour. It has also revealed an ambivalent attitude to rules - *the rules are good – they're right – but they don't always apply to **me!*** Her Majesty the Queen gave a timely reminder about that when she said *we don't just have the vaccine for ourselves. It's to keep other people safe too.* That's in the spirit of Jesus who explained that the life-commandments have to be interpreted by love – love for God and love for others. That's the '*normal*' by which Jesus builds the Kingdom of God and changes the world – the '*normal*' I believe we have to resume.

The Psalm today (19) follows the same theme in terms of creation and the natural world. It says, *'From the rising to the setting of the sun the normal – the lessons of the natural world - are all around us.* This year especially we shall hear many people speaking of how all life follows the Creator's patterns for sustainability.

Again, the point here is about how our failure to keep basic rules in simple ways contributes to the destruction of the natural world – *throwing my sandwich wrapper out of the car window contributes to that destruction in the same way as dropping a mile wide oil slick from an ocean-going tanker.*

The Gospel picture this week makes me think about when we get back to 'normal' as the Church. We really can't afford to be normal – it will have to be *more than normal!* In the Temple Jesus cries, *What's all this amazing structure here for? Have you spent forty-six years on a new building and forgotten the foundation? You should be asking what it's here for NOW?*

We may not be selling cattle in our churches but after the lock-down is a perfect opportunity to remember that the building used to be called *The House of God.* Its purpose is, like the Temple, to be a house of prayer for all people. It's meant to be both a place for worship and prayer and a loving community of God's presence where his words are remembered and followed and his works of love offered to the local community and across the world.

With all this in mind I wondered if the word 'normal' would give us a meaningful acronym? I came up with the following:

**Now On Right Message At Last**

That's a more than normal future.

It's my prayer and I hope many others may join me.

**Prayer** based on Psalm 19

Lord, your words are wise and strong;

Just and perfectly trustworthy;

Constant as the rising and setting of the sun:

Let them continue to be your sure foundation for us

In every aspect of our lives.

