

## **The Last Week - 3/7/10 – Ex. 20:1-17; Mark 12:28-34, 41-44 – Our GPS (God Positioning System)**

Tuesday is a day filled with conflict. I'm not talking about your or my Tuesday and the battle to get ourselves or the kids up and out the door, or about what we encounter in the work or school place, or even the conflicting needs and expectations when we get home. Rather, I'm talking about Jesus' Tuesday in Holy Week. After his edgy entry into Jerusalem on Sunday as the bearer of peace and non-violence, and his provocative actions on Monday in shutting down the temple's activities, the religious leaders now engage Jesus in heated debate as they seek to publicly discredit him. He is a growing threat to their authority and must be dealt with.

Of the many questions posed to Jesus is one about the commandments. The Torah or Law of Moses stood at the heart of their religious system. It formed the core of their identity and was the bedrock upon which they built their lives. Each rabbi had his own particular slant on how the Law was to be interpreted. That interpretation formed the guiding principle of the rabbi's life. When asked about his guiding principle, Jesus stepped back and looked at the commandments as a whole. What was their intent? What did God hope to achieve when giving them to his people? Contrary to what we often think, the Law was never intended to be a set of rules to be followed or a check list by which to live. Rather, it served as a guide for leading God's people into a way of being together. The Law embodied the relational principles for a healthy, vibrant community. As Eugene Peterson captures the words of the Great Commandment, "The Lord your God is one: so love the Lord God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence and energy. And here is the second: Love others as well as you love yourself." What would it look like to love God with all our passion, prayer, intelligence and energy? To me it's reminiscent of the feeling of being in love with another person. We're so consumed with our love for this person that we can hardly think of anything else. Everything we do or say is intended to show our love and bring joy to that person's life. So it is to be in our relationship with God. We are to settle for nothing less. Herein lies the rub. The seismic movement that creates the violent shaking of the religious leaders' system is that they've settled for something far less; something Jesus says is adulterous. Their interpretation of the Law and worship life relegated God to a particular day and activity. It had not changed their lives one bit in terms of how they treated the poor, the widows, orphans, or oppressed. In fact, they were in bed with the Roman authorities as they maintained their positions of power and wealth. They used the sacrificial system to pad their pockets rather than aid the hungry, the destitute, and infirmed.

This leads us into one of the final observations Jesus makes on that Tuesday. Jesus accuses those in power of "devouring widows' houses." Throughout the Hebrew Bible, widows are special objects of God's compassion. Without a man to provide for them, they were among the most vulnerable people. Their treatment was a measure of the justness of society. How exactly did the scribes devour widows' houses? As a literate class working for the wealthy, the scribes administered loan agreements and then foreclosed on widows' property when the loan could not be repaid. Sound familiar? It should! It reflects what's happened recently in the sub-prime lending and bundling of loans that led to our financial system imploding, people losing their jobs, and, for many, having their house foreclosed! All because of human greed and justifying their actions because, well, everyone else was doing it. As one person said, "We knew better, but we didn't want to be left behind." Isn't that fraudulent? Isn't that stealing from others? How is that a reflection of love of God and neighbor? What's the connection between faith and life? What happens on Sunday is meant to shape and direct our Mondays and Tuesdays and all the days of the week.

The indictment of the scribes for their treatment of widows is followed by the story of a poor widow who puts into the temple treasury "all she had." She gave with passion, prayer, intelligence, and energy. She knew the Scriptures and she counted on God providing for her through the generosity of the faith community. But that's not how the others gave. They gave measured, calculated amounts. They gave God his due, but they continued to live as if God didn't exist. At least, God's justice didn't exist in their hearts as this system continued to rob widows. Jesus condemns this system that leads this widow to remain impoverished.

I was struck by Tuesday's devotion on Journey to the Cross by Bruce Reyes-Chow. "There are days I want to come home and simply complain about my life: mean people, tragedies that make no sense and all the other things that are so unfair. Some of these things are not just about people misunderstanding me, but about pain in

the world, injustice in our communities and all of those things that seem unfair.” He then goes on to cite the things about which he is thankful, especially “people who model the love and wonder of God despite so much that is stacked against them. Our lives,” he concludes, “are not just about BEING thankful, but also having such a deep sense of gratitude that we are compelled to be in the world in transformative ways. When we are compelled by gratitude, driven by our passionate love for God, we can truly be God’s hands, hearts and minds.”

This is what lies at the heart of the Great Commandment. This is the guiding principle, the GPS, that led Jesus into conflict with the authorities. “When we are compelled by gratitude, driven by our passionate love for God, we can truly be God’s hands, hearts and minds.”