

“Holy Space”

Exodus 20:1-5a, 7a, 8-17, 1 John 4:19, 1 Kings 19:11-13, John 2:13-22

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March 7, 2021

Prayer for Understanding Loving God fill us with your Spirit, your breath, your abundant life. Open our eyes to beauty, our ears to harmony, our hearts to love, our minds to wisdom, and our souls to joy. Speak to us through your love letter to us the Bible and through one another. Amen

How does one create holy space to be filled with the glory of God, the wonder of God’s blessings, the extravagance of God’s grace and the ecstasy of God’s joy? God is always with us; however, our perception of God is feeble. We miss most of God’s love messages. Our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit; however, many feel worthless at times. Our heart is constantly being filled with love; however, we sometimes struggle to share love with everyone. Our lungs are constantly being filled with Ruah, God’s breath, wind, life force; however, we sometimes endure fatigue. Our body is constantly being cleansed with living water; however, sometimes we languish over past difficulties, mistakes, and failures. Our body is constantly being nourished with the bread of life that completely satisfies every hunger; however, we sometimes refuse to partake and other times partake of hurtful sustenance. Our minds are capable of guiding us on the most excellent way of love; however, at times our thoughts are erratic, distracting, and confusing.

The Israelites were enslaved. God set them free to enjoy holy space. They had no government, social services, rules, laws, or police. God gave them the Ten Commandments, so they could thrive together in community. Living the intent of the Ten Commandments keeps a person free.

The first four commandments instruct us to keep holy space for God in our lives, to remember our identity as God’s beloved child. It is easy to become enslaved by a myriad of idols. The idol of work whenever one gets their identity from their work or gives priority to work over worship, family, or self-care. The idol of perfection that diminishes empathy or cripples with procrastination. The idol of conformity. God creates each person a unique masterpiece this is accepted, loved, and beautiful. The idol of conformity tells us that one needs to look or behave in a certain way to be accepted, loved, and beautiful. The idol of comparisons distracts one from God’s delight in the unique beauty of each person. The idol of human expectations imprisons one to live another’s life. Idols clutter the holy space that only God can perfectly fill.

The concluding six commandments instruct us to keep holy space for our self. Fighting with parents, hate, murder, lust, betrayal, stealing, lying, and jealousy destroys our relationships, our ability to love, our freedom. Breaking the commandments clutter the holy space that only loving relationships can fill.

God made us for love and designed us to love. We thrive when we love God, love all people and love ourselves. The Ten Commandments give us specific ways we can grow in love. The Ten Commandments guide us in holding holy space for love. Notice that the Ten Commandments begin with God’s love for us. God claims us as God’s beloved family by declaring “I am your God”. God graciously rescues us from every form of slavery. John simply states, **1 John 4:19 “We love because God first loved us.”**

Exodus 20:1-5a, 7a, 8-17 NLT “Then God gave the people all these instructions: “I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. “You must not have any other god but me. “You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. “You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God. “Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your children, your servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day God rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. Honor your father and mother. You must not murder. You must not commit adultery. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely against your neighbor. You must not covet your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s spouse, servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”

Bernie and Esther only went to temple once a year. As they were leaving the temple, the rabbi said, "Bernie, it sure would be nice to see you and Esther here more than once a year!" "I know," replied Bernie, "but at least we keep

the Ten Commandments." "That's great," the rabbi said. "I'm glad to hear that you keep the Commandments." "Yep," Bernie said proudly, "Esther keeps six of them and I keep the other four."

The Ten Commandments guide us to hold Holy Space for love so humanity can thrive as a harmonious community. Old Testament worship focused on holding holy space. In the heart of old Jerusalem was the temple. In the heart of the temple, within its innermost sanctuary, was the "Holy of Holies," where only the high priest was allowed to visit. In the heart of the "Holy of Holies," separated by partitions and curtains, sat the ark itself. In the heart of the ark was the throne, or mercy seat. The mercy seat was a flat slab of gold resting on top of the ark. Protecting the holy space were the golden cherubim, their faces inward turned toward each other and their wings arching over the mercy seat. Here between the cherubim and over the mercy seat was the holy space, the dwelling of God of Israel. Some imagine this space to be sort of like the belly button of a child in the womb, the space where life flows in creating life, the space where toxins flow out to be purified.

The cherubim did not reside on the mercy seat. God's presence was nowhere portrayed within this "Holy of Holies"--or anywhere else within the temple. All that greeted the high priest was a blank slab of open space, a void, the great speaking absence between the images. In other words, the most sacred was the holy empty space. What the Israelites carried with them through the wilderness and protected with their lives was a seat with nothing on it, but everything in it. To go to Jerusalem to visit God, to make a pilgrimage to find mercy, comfort, forgiveness, healing, renewal was to visit holy empty space. It is exactly because there was no gilded statue, no talking idol that the Israelites were able to experience the living presence of God's holiness in their midst.

When the prophet Elijah was dejected, exhausted, burnt out, overcome with negative thoughts, pessimistic about the future, fearing that humanity's sinfulness will not all be perfected by God's grace; God guided Elijah to a secluded cave where God reestablished holy space in Elijah's mind and heart. **1 Kings 19:11-13 NLT "Go out and stand before me on the mountain," the Lord told Elijah. And as Elijah stood there, the Lord passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire there was the sound of a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave."**

Over the years, the holy space of the temple was being increasingly invaded by all sorts of distracting activities. **John 2:13-22 NLT "It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area Jesus saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; Jesus also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes and chased them all out of the Temple. Jesus drove out the sheep and cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, and turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, Jesus told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning God's house into a marketplace!" Then Jesus' disciples remembered this prophecy from the Scriptures: "Passion for God's house will consume me." But the Jewish leaders demanded, "What are you doing? If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it." "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "What!" they exclaimed. "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you can rebuild it in three days?" But when Jesus said "this temple," he meant his own body. After Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this, and they believed both the Scriptures and what Jesus had said."**

Jesus' actions in the temple were a reaction against the intrusions of noise, images, programs, commerce, clutter into the sanctuary of holy space. Jesus saw that the temple site was gradually being transformed from a center of spirituality, a holy space that leads one to greater love, to a place of confusion, clutter, hustle, and bustle. The holy space designed to enable one to be still and know God, to be blessed, to receive God's grace, was being diminished by human actions, human attempts to earn forgiveness. By cleansing the temple of all this clutter, Jesus sought to restore holy space for everyone to receive God's love.

Are we hesitant to hold holy space for God perhaps because we dislike the idea of loving all people, we dislike the idea of giving control to God, we dislike the idea of acknowledging that everyone is a wonderful child of God? What if holding holy space for God enables me to perceive God asking me to forgive, or serve that one person that irritates me, or asks me to change? Often it seems safe to fill the holy space with things we are already doing. As a church are we letting busy work, meetings, budgets, programs clutter the holy space where God is communicating? In our families are we letting pandemic frustrations, politics, schedules, old feuds, and bad habits clutter the holy space of God's grace, healing, restoration, mended relationships? In our work, are we letting concerns about getting ahead, being left behind, making more money clutter the holy space of ethics, empathy and care of one another and care of the planet? In our schools, are we letting peer pressure, insecurity, insistence on certain ways of teaching and learning

clutter the holy space of wonder, wisdom, and a joy of learning? In our communities, are we letting desire for the status quo, prejudice, isms, concern that if we share their will not be enough for all, fear of anything new, fear of the unknown, fear of differences clutter the holy space of empathy and extravagant love for everyone? In our politics are we letting the urge to win, greed, and power clutter the holy space of serving together, serving everyone, serving through compromised, shared ways of love?

In our celebration of holy communion, will you clear enough holy space to perceive God? Will you imagine enough holy space around the table for everyone, all the people from the beginning of time, and for eternity, to gather around the table, each person having a unique spot reserved for them? Will you let go so you have holy space to let come the bread of life that satisfies every hunger. Will you forgive so you have holy space for grace to make every relationship robust? Will you admit your brokenness and need for a savior, so you have holy space for the cup of salvation to make you whole and save you?

Jesus revealed Godself, a new temple, a new mercy seat for God's presence, a new holy space through which grace, blessings, and life flow. You are a temple for the Holy Spirit. All people are a temple for the Holy Spirit. Each of us was created with holy space that can only be completely, perfectly, gloriously filled by God. As God fills our holy space, our love expands. God does not force us to love. God gives us free will, choices, opportunities to receive and share love. During lent, seek to clean out your holy spaces for they will be filled with resurrection. All the suffering, hurt, sin, ugliness, darkness of the world was crammed into Jesus' crucified, dead body and sealed in a tomb. God's grace cleared the space, filled it with radiant love and resurrection life. The tomb is open, and the glory of that holy space gives life to all. Amen