

Sermon: From Revelation to Realization

Scripture: John 2:13-22; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Third Sunday in Lent

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Today's first reading comes from the Gospel of John 2:13-22, where we witness Jesus cleansing the temple, driving out those who turned his Father's house into a marketplace. This act wasn't merely a display of righteous indignation; it was a revelation of divine authority. Yet, it was not until later, through the lens of hindsight, that his disciples fully grasped the significance of this event. Hear now, the Word of the Lord.

John 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. Amen.

Our second Scripture reading comes from the first letter to the Corinthians 1:18-25. Paul reminds us of the apparent foolishness of the cross to the world. The message of Christ crucified may seem like folly to the wise of this world, but to those who believe, it is the power of God unto salvation.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

<sup>18</sup> For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Let us pray.

Loving and Holy God, as we come before you this morning, may you reveal yourself to us in an intimate way, that we may experience your abundant love and mercy for us. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our Rock and our Redeemer, Amen.

Every year during Lenten Season, I share my previous examples of practice of Lenten observances to share what I have learned about who I am as we commemorate the 40 days Jesus Christ spent fasting in the desert and endured through trials prior to his public ministry. This morning, I would like to share my “cone of shame” moment, as often it is the case with my Lenten stories.

During my college days, I decided to take on the challenge of Lenten abstinence with my peers. I thought I had found the perfect task: giving up fast food for Lent. After all, living in a dormitory with meals provided and able to eat at several Korean restaurants when dorm meals seem less pleasant, it seemed like an easy sacrifice. Little did I know, the bombardment of fast-food advertisements made it a constant struggle. Everywhere I turned, I was tempted by commercials urging me to indulge my instant gratification desires. As the days passed, fast-food signs seemed to loom larger, drawing me in like a magnet. I became acutely aware of every fast-food restaurant within a 5-mile radius of my dormitory and my childhood home, obsessively scanning for them whenever I was in a car, like a dog chasing after a squirrel.

After about two weeks, a whopper of heavy feeling came to be when I realized that I ate a burger without thinking. Feeling shame and guilt, I realized that I am not the person I thought I was by failing at this simple task, that I could not undo what I ate. Yet, I was not surprised at the realization that I had failed. What surprised me was that it brought the revelation of God’s amazing grace – that saved a sinner like me – to life. I did not linger too long on the failure of keeping my Lenten observance, but it led me to receive grace in an intimate, personal way, through a personal experience.

I am sure that we all experienced something similar in our lives. We also share moments like what the disciples went through in the Gospel of John’s passage, where they realized, what God has revealed to them made sense much later. In today’s Bible passages, we encounter the tension between revelation and realization. Revelation, as Paul Tillich eloquently puts it, is not merely a passive reception but an active appropriation of something new. It is a dynamic response to God’s continual disclosure of Godself to us. Yet, realization requires more than passive acknowledgment; it demands active participation. It calls us to reflect deeply on the significance of God’s revelation in our lives and to respond with faith and obedience.<sup>1</sup>

So how do we move from revelation to realization and how do we ensure that our faith is not stagnant but ever-growing and dynamic? The answer lies in our willingness to engage in personal reflection, to peer into the rearview mirror of our lives and acknowledge the moments when God has revealed Godself to us. Hindsight, as they say, is 20/20, and as we look back on our journey of faith, we can discern the hand of God at work, guiding and shaping us every step of the way.

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<sup>1</sup> “Realization is not a passive reception of something already there, but an active appropriation of something new. It is not a mere recognition of what is already known, but a discovery of what is previously unknown. It is not a static affirmation of what is already given, but a dynamic response to what is continually given.” - Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology

Yet, it is not enough to merely acknowledge these moments of revelation; we must also respond to them with humility and gratitude. We must, as Karl Barth reminds us, enter into communion with God, embracing God's love and grace with open hearts. God's revelation is not merely a communication of knowledge; it is an invitation to intimacy, a call to love and be loved by the Creator of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, as we come to moments of revelation and realization, which are gifts from God to help us grow in knowledge, faith, and love, there are few things that makes the connection easier and experience the daily love of God in our lives.

First is that we must acknowledge our feelings—our doubts, fears, anger, and uncertainties—and bring them before God in prayer. Too often, we try to suppress or ignore these emotions, fearing that they may reveal our weakness or lack of faith. But God invites us to bring our whole selves before God just as we are, trusting that God will meet us in our vulnerability and lead us to a deeper understanding of God's love and grace. We need to remember that our God is an overcomer. Whatever we may face, let us echo what Paul testified about God: that God told us, ““My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, we must continue to seek guidance from God, trusting in God's wisdom and providence to direct our paths. We confess together that God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. Realization is an ongoing process, a journey of faith that requires us to remain steadfast in our devotion to God, even when the road ahead seems uncertain. Like the disciples who followed Jesus despite their doubts and fears, we too must trust in God's faithfulness to lead us to greater depths of understanding and revelation.

Finally, we must share our moments of realization with others, bearing witness to God's faithfulness and love in our lives. Just as Jesus shared the revelation of his Father's house with his disciples, so too are we called to share our experiences of God's presence and power with those around us. In doing so, we not only affirm our own faith but also inspire others to seek God in their own lives, fostering a community of believers bound together by the transformative power of God's love.

Hence, peers in the journey of faith, our challenge before us today is not simply will you abstain from an easy task but being open to transformation through revelation and realization in a communion of life with God and with each other. It is not simply sharing of what Bible told me so but testifying the experiences of various attribute of God. Let us never tire of seeking God's revelation, knowing that each disclosure is a testament to God's boundless love for us. And may we respond to God's call with our hearts fully open with faith and gratitude.

Amen.

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<sup>2</sup> “Revelation is not only a communication of God, but a communion with God. It is not only a manifestation of God, but a participation in God. It is not only a knowledge of God, but a love of God. It is not only a gift of God, but a grace of God.” - Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 12:9 ESV