

Sermon – John 2:13-22; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
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Grace Lutheran Church  
3 Lent – Year B  
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### “The Fool on the Hill”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. We arrived at the car rental shop in Wittenberg expecting to find the car we had rented. Our young family had reserved a car online for a day trip to Potsdam. We were taking a trip to see Sanssouci, the eighteenth-century palace of Frederick the Great, the “German Versailles” designed and built by Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff – a fact incidental to the story except that I wanted to say, “Georg Wenzeslaus von Knobelsdorff.” Anyway, at the rental office we were greeted with what seemed like disappointing news: the car we had reserved was no longer available. I’m not a car guy so I don’t remember the details, but I think it was only a step above a Schwinn ten-speed. “Would you mind,” the clerk asked us, “if we gave you a different car for the same price?” His hands swept toward a shiny machine. Again, I’m no car guy, but I know a top-of-the-line Mercedes when I see one. Stifling a grin, I muttered, “I guess it’ll have to do.” We eased our way out of town and onto the Autobahn. As you may have heard, I’m no car guy, but suddenly I was where I was meant to be, in a finely-tuned automobile with three kids strapped into car seats, hurtling along a pristine roadway without a speed limit. Cruising along at 100 mph or so – which felt even better when measured in kilometers – we got to Sanssouci in no time. Sans souci; without worries, indeed. This was what I was made for! A life without limits! I mean, I’m an excellent driver. Why should I ever need a speed limit? A world

- without rules is the world for me! How dare this country impose limits on me?
2. As a species, we are not overly fond of rules or limits. We want to do what we want to do, go where we want to go, be who we want to be. Why shouldn't we? Well, as God told the Israelites at Sinai, because it's not always about you. The reason I am not allowed to drive 100 mph on the Eisenhower or on Roosevelt Road isn't because of me; it's because of you. I am limited in what I can do so that you can be safe. The last thing you need while running out to buy milk and eggs before a storm is me coming at you like a maniac. We find ourselves this morning just outside of Egypt, on the verge of a new life in a new land, and the voice of God comes crashing over us. *I am the Lord your God* and, as you enter the Promised Land, this is what you shall and shall not do. Why? Because God wants to limit us? Or because God wants the shared life of the community to be one without limits, a sign of the abundance God desires for all people?
  3. Many of the other legal codes of the ancient Near East of which we are aware are heavy on worship. The so-called gods who gave them out wanted to be sure the focus was on them. One of the unique factors of the covenant made at Sinai is that while it begins with God, your God, the One who brought the people up out of Egypt, it doesn't linger long on the divine. God makes it clear that this particular God is the only one to be worshipped. Once that is established, however, it becomes clear what God cares most about, which is us caring for one another. Why shalt we not do this or that? Because God arbitrarily wants to limit us? No. Because God wants our neighbor to flourish and thrive alongside us in community.
  4. Because of our sinfulness, however, our refusal to put anyone but ourselves first, the Law functions in a second way. It shows us how far we have fallen short of God's intention to live in a beloved community in which all are

welcome, in which all have enough. So, God orders a Temple built, both so that the people would have a place to worship and so that sacrifice could be made for the atonement of sin. But this was never God's final intention, and when God incarnate shows up on the scene, it's time for a change. We know from the other gospel accounts that Jesus was upset with the greed and extortion of the animal sellers and money changers. But here, it's clear that Jesus hasn't come simply to reform the system but to upend it entirely. No longer is proximity to the divine to be restricted to this or any other Temple. No longer is forgiveness to be bought or sold, acquired by sacrifice. The time of this Temple is past. If you want to be in the presence of God, look to the One who will be put to death and yet now lives without limit, for your sake and for the salvation of the whole world. For you and for your neighbor, wherever they come from, whatever they look like, however they live. Look to Christ and see your neighbors through his eyes.

5. It's foolishness, of course. Who are you, Jesus, to say such a thing? Foolish to believe the Temple could be rebuilt in three days. More foolish still to predict his own resurrection from the dead. But the whole thing is foolish, isn't it? That the same God with whom we have failed to keep covenant would take on our human lot and life? That the same God who only asked that we care for our neighbor would move into our neighborhood? That the God we once imagined was so hard to access, so stern and demanding, is alive and at play in all places, giving away grace for free. Which is what makes it grace, of course. We thought we lived in a world of marketplaces and mutual demands, but here comes Jesus, overturning everything and giving away the house for free. How incredibly foolish it seems – Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God on full display.
6. In this season of baptismal preparation and renewal, we remember that it is into this very foolishness that we were baptized. Christ is alive and you live in him. Newly alive, you are gifted with the vocation of the baptized, which

oddly enough ends up looking an awful like the covenant given in the commandments. You have one God, the God most fully revealed in the Christ who took on our human limits and died for us. You have one God, the God shown forth in the glory of Jesus' resurrection. We worship this God not with sacrifice but with service. We look to our neighbors – the marginalized and the migrant, the overlooked and the oppressed, the lonely and the seemingly unlovable – and we love them, and we do so by seeking to meet their very real needs. In the abundance of the life of God, we limit ourselves so that the unlimited love of Christ would be known. It's all a bit foolish, perhaps, in this world of marketplaces, of buying and selling, of more and more, but Christ has overturned the old ways of being. Worship the Lord your God with a sacrifice of joyful praise, and then worship this God by lovingly and joyfully caring for your neighbor, whoever they may be, with all speed, and there you will see Jesus. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.