

Sometimes late-night TV turns up a surprise.

Ride Upon the Storm screened some time ago, late on Sunday night. It was the story of a family.

Johannes is a Minister in the Danish State church. He stands in a 250-year history. The weight of this tradition has broken this proud family almost beyond repair. Johannes is bound by ambition, anger and resentment. He is so consumed by the tradition he worships that he misses the God his family are called to serve.

Johannes has forgotten, that we are to love God...our wives, our children, our colleagues...our neighbours as ourselves.

Not our family history, our place in the church hierarchy, our reputations.

Our three readings give us pause for thought around these matters.

The 10 commandments are the most famous words in the first testament, but by Jesus time understanding and interpreting them was causing problems. It seemed the intention of the commandments was being ignored. Jesus summed them up "we love God and neighbour."

The commandments are the magnificence of Israel, intended as witness to God, but they are turned in to a standard of religious devotion, obscuring the one to whom they witness. All that matters is the standard, not God whom the commandments bear witness too.

Israel is to love God and neighbour.

Jesus comes to the temple early in John. Here he runs riot, overturning tables and cages, shouting and yelling. His spirit is a fire as he scorches that place.

As he burns through the temple, a roaring furnace with his words...

The Temple is the magnificence of Jerusalem, intended as witness to God, but turned into a marketplace of religious devotion, obscuring the one to whom it witnessed. All that matters is the money made in the Temple, not God whom the temple bears witness too.

Israel is to love God and neighbour.

Rites and places are essential, but within them danger lurks. They must not become so important that they obscure God to whom they bear witness ...

Johannes has this magnificent 250-year tradition. But instead of being a liberating witness to God it has become bondage, chaining him and his family at every turn.

Like Johannes, the Israelites with the 10 commandments and the Temple, is the church in danger of making the same mistakes? Of making good things objects of religious devotion? Obscuring God whom they witness too...

Is it possible that the church places love of things over love of neighbour? Is it possible that love of buildings, heritage, clergy, organisations, hymn books, crosses, prayer books, chalices and patterns, organs, music, albs, stoles, chasubles, are placed ... over love of neighbour?

Are these things valued so highly that they obscure the God they bear witness to?

Rites, places and objects are essential. But they must not be made so important that they obscure the one to whom they witness...

Paul helps here. He knows that the gospel is foolishness and absurdity. The absurdity of a crucified God. A crucified God hanging on a tree....

Foolish and absurd ... This is Jesus love of God and neighbour.

This, Paul says, is what we preach, not family traditions like Johannes, worship style, church heritage, not albs, stoles, chalices and patterns, not clergy, bishops and prayer books,

... our favourite organisations ... our 10 commandments, our temples...as good as these might be ... we don't preach these, because nothing is to obscure God to whom they bear witness...

We preach God in Christ crucified hanging on a tree.

This is Jesus love of God and neighbour. Foolish and absurd ...

And in Lent we remember especially ... that we are called to do likewise.

To preach and to love ... and not to obscure.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.