

**These are great Scripture readings as we approach Lent because they give us special affirmation while at the same time a big challenge, maybe things to focus on during Lent: holiness, forgiveness and reconciliation.**

***“Do you not know that you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you?”*** That is a powerful statement of truth. Remember the story in Luke’s gospel of Jesus meeting Zacchaeus, the tax collector watching him from the treetop? Jesus says to him, ***“Come down quickly for today I must stay at your house.”*** St. Paul reminds us that the Lord stays in our house – you are the temple of God, the Spirit dwells in you! That tells each of us, first, we are not alone and, second, we are capable of doing whatever God asks of us. It’s like having that best friend or spouse or coach who whispers in your ear, ***“you can do this; I am with you all the way.”***

**But love your enemies? “They have hurt me, or us, too much. To love them is to drop my guard or to agree with them, or, at least to ignore the terrible things they have done.”** But Jesus did not agree with his enemies nor ignore the terrible things they had done, yet he does ask his Father to forgive them. ***“I am with you all the way.”*** If I am a temple of God, there is no room in my house for hatred.

**But is it really wise to turn the other cheek or offer my cloak to the one who demands my tunic? That seems counter-intuitive, to invite trouble. But I think, much like the phrase we heard**

**last Sunday to pluck out your eye or cut off your hand if it causes you to sin, it is not meant to be followed literally.**

**Rather, it is a call to perspective. *“If any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God.”* St. Paul tells us. We might say, pick your battles for they are not all equal. The stance for one’s soul is more important than the stance for one’s body, one’s physical stuff.**

**Examples: As political caucuses happen here and more and more around the country and candidates are vying for support we have a choice to either contribute to the division – the “hate your enemies” approach – or, contribute to healing and understanding – still stating one’s opinion and the truth as you understand it. Or as that former colleague or competitor crosses your path, or that family member you no longer speak to comes to the wedding you can either grit your teeth and shoot the dirty looks or you can place it all in the hands of God and be at peace: “you can do this; you are the temple of God; I am with you all the way.”**

**I remember the killing of several girls at the Amish school in Lancaster, PA years ago, the shooter killed himself also. In the midst of that pain and anguish, words of forgiveness were spoken by family members and some even went to comfort the family of the killer. At his funeral, Amish mourners outnumbered the non-Amish. How were they able to do that? They knew, *“you are the temple of God and the Spirit of God***

*dwells in you.”* If we can carry that vision, everything else looks different. “[For] *If you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? ... what is unusual about that?*” Jesus asks.

Discipleship cannot be content with merely the “usual” standard of the world. “*Be perfect just as your heavenly father is perfect,*” does not mean to be without error, it means to love as the Lord loves. Leviticus put it, “*Be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.*” These commands can seem to be so far beyond us. But we are not alone and we are capable of doing whatever God asks of us: “*You are the temple of God and the Spirit of God dwells in you.*”