

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Lent 3B
March 7, 2021
John 2:13-22

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (John 2:18-21 ESV)

In the Name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world.

Jesus appears to us today not as the meek, mild, lowly, and maybe even cuddly Jesus we so often think of, but as the angry, zealous, even violent, Jesus who creates a commotion in the Temple. And this can make us a little uncomfortable. After all, we live in a time where zealotry, or extremism, is thought to be very bad, especially in matters of faith or religion. We're much more comfortable with a more laid-back, casual religion than a formal or demanding religion. So what are we to do with Jesus today?

When God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, His glory appeared to them at the tent of meeting as a pillar of cloud or fire. The people dared not approach such glory for fear of being destroyed. So God gave them the sacrificial system so they would not approach without the shedding of blood for sin. When Solomon built the temple in Jerusalem, God's glory dwelt there. Indeed, God had declared, "I have consecrated this temple, which you have built, by putting my Name there forever. My eyes and My heart will always be there." (1 Kings 9:3). That Temple was to be the place where the people would come into the very presence of God. It was to be a place of prayer and of sacrifice for sin. It was to be a place where God would bless His people.

Yet, it was but a foreshadowing of a greater Temple yet to come. For temples made with hands inevitably fall, and when Solomon's temple fell, Zerubbabel built another. That one, like the first, could not last, and Herod built a third, a building that required 46 years of labor and it still wasn't done. Yet even that temple could not last. A better, indestructible temple was necessary. A temple for the eternal and unchanging God must be a temple established by God Himself; one that, even after it is destroyed would rise again in only three days (John 2:19). And when Jesus spoke such scandalous words in the temple courts, He was speaking of the temple of His body (John 2:21).

So here is Jesus in the Temple courts filled with the noise of a marketplace. Pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem for the Passover couldn't very well bring all of the animals necessary for the various sacrifices that were required. So they would bring their money, buy the bulls, lambs, or

pigeons, then offer them on the altar. And since people came from all over the world and brought their various kinds of money, there was a need for a monetary exchange. Yes, the Temple had become a full-service church. All that was needed was some cash.

But such was not to be. God's house of prayer and forgiveness had been turned into a house of Mammon. They had replaced the true worship of God with idolatry. Business and profit and even sacrifice became more important than meeting with God Himself and receiving His gifts. The forgiveness of sins had gotten lost in there. It got pushed to the side, and other interests, self-interests, took over. The temple courts were anything but Godly.

So, what about us? Nothing like that can happen in the church today, right? We're not buying and selling animals or exchanging currency out in the narthex. Still there's a problem, a really big problem, whenever anything overshadows or pushes to the side the real purpose of the church, which—still today—is the forgiveness of sins through Christ. There's a problem when other things set up shop in the church and become the big thing. Some religious merchants sell entertainment and "contemporary" worship. Some capitalize on their big smiles and funny stories and pleasing personalities. Others market their advice for being successful or happy or "purpose-driven." There's a never-ending supply of experts who peddle their techniques for driving up numbers. When these things happen at the expense of truth and substance and depth, when the gospel gets shoved to the side, when the forgiveness of sins gets taken for granted or is even seen as an impediment to growth, Jesus gets angry. And He and all faithful prophets of God want to drive these religious hucksters out of God's house.

When Jesus sees this outrageous desecration of His Father's house, He does something about it. He makes a whip and drives "them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen," (John 2:15), declaring that the merchants and moneychangers had turned His Father's house into a market, or emporium. (John 2:16). There was no place for them there, for they had turned those quiet precincts of prayer and meditation into a cacophonous madhouse. But even worse, by selling their products and making their profits from the pious faithful who had come to worship, they had given the impression that the things of God are a marketable product, a commodity to be bartered and negotiated for the best price. It is almost an understatement for the disciples to remember the words of the prophet, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me" (John 2:17).

But Jesus does not merely concern Himself with decorum and propriety of worship. Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. Thus He removed the leaven of men's business. He thus anticipates the last and greatest Passover festival, the one that would fulfill all Passovers. It is almost as if He cannot wait for His own Passover work to begin. Today He strips all money from these courts, emphasizing that there is no gold, no silver, no offering that can be made in payment for what God Himself is about to give. For you know "that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." (1 Peter 1:18-19). After making His whip, Jesus cleanses the temple of the sacrificial offerings themselves. In so doing He anticipates His own sacrificial offering, the offering of His

own flesh and blood for the sake of the world. He is the High Priest, but “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.” (Heb. 7:27).

But Jesus is not merely the sacrificial offering. The Jews demanded of Him, “‘What sign do you show us for doing these things?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ The Jews then said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking about the temple of his body.” (John 2:18-21).

Herod's magnificent building was only that - a magnificent building, a temple made with human hands, a future ruin. God resides in the humanity of Mary's Son, and at His death the temple veil was torn in two (Mark 15:37). But true to His Word, the third day after His death He rose from the dead. The holy of holies no longer hides within the deepest confines of those stone-cut courts, but the holy of holies now walks among men and talks to men and heals men of their diseases and banishes the demons from them. He is the sacrifice, He is the priest, He is the temple. This is an amazing picture that St. John would have us see here, for he portrays Jesus as the one who fully embodies everything that once expressed the hope and desire of antiquity, and He now dwells among us who gather to worship Him.

Yes, my friends, Christ calls Himself a temple, and so He is. For in Him, in His own person, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,” as St. Paul tells us (Col. 2:9). And if anyone now seeks God apart from Christ, he should be warned that God will not be found. “For . . . without Christ there is no God. All those who seek God elsewhere than in Christ - [whether in Jerusalem or in Mecca or in any other place, including one's heart] - they will find no God and will perish” (Luther). But here there is great comfort for us, who are the worshipers of Christ. For we know that by His mercy, we shall not be driven away from His holy presence.

Yes, the Temple of God is not a building, but a Person. And that Person is zealous—for you, for your forgiveness, for your life. God grant that you rejoice in Christ Who forgives all your sins and Who will raise you to live with Him forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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