

## Written Copy: John 2:14-17 “Removing the Clutter”

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent  
Sunday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2021

### Text: John 2:14-17

<sup>14</sup> In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.

<sup>15</sup> And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

### Exegetical Statement

Jesus comes to Jerusalem as a good Jew would to celebrate the Passover. This is the first trip He makes with His Disciples of His official ministry, although He had doubtlessly come many times before as a young boy and leading up to His baptism by John. When He arrives, He discovers things going on in the outer court of the Gentiles that are not good, right, and salutary for the place of prayer to the LORD. While the selling of animals for worship and the exchange of coins were necessary for the current sacrificial worship of the LORD, they should not be happening inside the temple courts. So Jesus cleanses the temple of both the animals and those trading them, as well as the money changers. He banishes all those who have made the house of the LORD into a house of commerce, where those trading, including the Jews who authorized them to be there are making a profit. This action will, after Jesus resurrection, bring to mind the prophetic words from Psalm 69:9 "zeal for Your House will consume me". Those Jews in charge of the temple demand Jesus to give a sign that confirms He has greater authority over what goes on in the temple than they do. Jesus responds by saying "Destroy this temple and I will raise it in three days." The Jews hear this as Jesus speaking of destroying and rebuilding the physical temple building. But Jesus is speaking prophetically of His death and resurrection, and of Himself as the true divine sanctuary of God on earth. With the Jews limited understanding from human wisdom they mock Jesus' answer saying, "This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and you're saying you could rebuild it from the ground up in three days?" But the Disciples after the resurrection gained, by the Holy Spirit the true meaning of Jesus' response as His resurrected and glorified body is the new and purified temple the Messiah was prophesied to build. And even more so, by His resurrection He is the cornerstone for the rebuilt house of God which is His New Testament Church where He dwells by His Spirit intimately in all who believe in the founding rock of faith, "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

### Focus Statement:

Jesus was sent to cleanse and purify the physical temple in Jerusalem for those to worship at that time. But as the dwelling place of God on earthy He is the more perfect temple of God on earth where the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the whole world was offered. In His resurrection He presented Himself as the purified and glorified temple of God. Through the gift of baptism that unites us with His resurrection and grants us the Holy Spirit we are made cleansed temples of God on earth.

### Function Statement:

#### Why it's important to know:

Just as the temple was cluttered with worldly activities that are not conducive to worship, we clutter our schedule and minds with things that stand in the way of true worship and service to our God.

#### What the hearer should do as a result:

Understand the need to gather as His Church, the collective body of Christ, His temple on earth to continually cleanse ourselves to remain His holy temple and do the ministry of building His temple to include the lost He calls to be His temple now, and on the Last Day, live in His glorious presence forever.

### Subject Sentence: Gathered in His Presence Jesus removes the clutter.

## **Introduction: The Clutter In Our Lives**

Do you ever find it hard to get started on a project? Many times for me it's all a matter of getting focused, getting in the groove, especially when I sit down to write a sermon. Before I get started, I need to clear the clutter that has accumulated on my desk. And what is clutter? It can be left over dishes and coffee cups that did not magically make their way into the kitchen sink as I hoped they would. It can be ads and junk mail that I brought in from the mailbox and just set down. By and large these are things that have no purpose anymore and need to be taken care of.

But there are also those things that are useful and needed, just not needed right now. Bills that need to be paid. Magazines that I want to read, some of them theological that will assist me in future sermon writing. Books that I want to read that help not only to refresh my mind in between sermons, or work to build up my vocabulary, but can provide fodder for illustrative examples for sermons to come. All these are needed things, just not needed right now. And their presence is a distraction to me. I look at them and say to myself, I really need to take care of this. But that nagging thought can distract from my focus on the things at hand, what I need to do right now!

Perhaps you have a place in your house where clutter gathers. For many it's the kitchen table, or the table in the living room by where you sit. Things gather there that you need to sort through and deal with, but more things seem to appear than you have time to deal with. How about your email inbox? How much clutter gathers there? To help with clutter I try to keep one email for personal business and one for Church business. Even so I find both of them getting filled with clutter. There are the text messages, Facebook posts, Facebook messenger, all of which can be useful in staying in contact with each other. But they all become clutter that takes us away from what is really important.

And then there's COVID-19 and our desire to remain free from infection. There are all the CDC guidelines for avoiding infection, all of these good and useful in their place. But can they become clutter when they stand in the way of something that is more important, especially when that more important thing is time spent in the presence of our Lord and Savior?

## **Jesus Removing the Clutter from the Temple**

**John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

In our Gospel Lesson we see Jesus coming to the temple to deal with clutter in a very real and physical sense. While Jesus has made many trips to the temple in Jerusalem as a boy growing up, and as a young adult prior to the start of His ministry, this is the first of three Passovers He will celebrate as a part of His public ministry.

**John 12:14 In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there.**

He arrives at the temple and discovers things are not as they should be in the place that is dedicated to the worship of and prayer to the LORD. Specifically, in the outer Court of the Gentiles, the court that truly makes the Temple in Jerusalem a house of prayer for all nations, there is anything but prayer going on. There is clutter. Now these things He finds are not in and of themselves unnecessary activities. With the Jewish people spread throughout the Roman Empire but called to travel to Jerusalem for this festival that can necessitate and arduous journey. Traveling that far with animals for sacrifice would not be the easiest thing in that day. And if you tried, chances are when you got to Jerusalem, they wouldn't be in any kind of shape to be the perfect sacrificial lamb that was needed for Passover. So providing animals for sacrifice was a needful thing. Likewise the exchanging of currency was needed. The normal currency of trade was either the Roman denarius or the Greek drachma. But the temple tax needed to be paid in temple currency. Travelers coming from throughout the empire needed currency exchange, much as we do when we take trips outside our country, such as to Canada.

While these are necessary activities, they become clutter when they stand in the way of what is supposed to be going on in the Temple: worship and prayer. Imagine how noisy it was what with all the animals, their noise, and their smell. Add to that the noise of the men selling them and the sound of currency being counted out. Add to that the noise of bartering for your animal or your correct currency exchange. These sellers of sacrificial animals and the money changers didn't do these things for free. They earned a profit from it. And then the Jewish Rulers took their cut of the profits off the top. That's why they allowed them in the temple in the first place, so they could claim a cut. The things that were supposed to be going on in the temple courts: worship and prayer, would be next to impossible with all the noise, with all the clutter. This clutter needed to be relocated outside the temple.

**John 2:15 And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.**

And that's what Jesus has come to do. Of course those selling and exchanging in the temple courts are reluctant to move. They have a captive audience with all those coming to worship at the temple. And the Jewish Leaders and chief priests don't want to change things just because some Rabbi from the hick towns of Galilee thinks it's wrong. They need some real encouragement to do so.

So Jesus acts with determination and force to remove this clutter. He makes something resembling a whip out of cords: meaning either the material that composed the bedding for the animals or perhaps the ropes that were used to lead them in and tie them up. With this whip He strongly encourages the sellers of animals in no uncertain terms to vacate the premises with their animals. The money changers are put out of business with the overturning of their tables.

**John 2:16 And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."**

Perhaps with a touch of mercy Jesus does not open the cages and let loose the pigeons. But He forcefully orders the pigeon sellers to vacate as well with their birds. And then, addressing the whole assembly of them, explains why He is doing this, ***"Stop making my Father's house, the place where He is to be worshiped, a marketplace! This is not the place for these activities. Here they are nothing more than sinful clutter that stands in the way of worshiping the One True God."*** And here also He gives some insight as to why He has the authority to do what He is doing: this is His Father's house, which means that, according to the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of the Living God, the temple is also His house.

**John 2:18 So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"**

Those who have been allowing this clutter to fill the temple for their own sinful and selfish reasons take exception to Jesus acting with an authority they don't see Him as possessing. Perhaps they know His claim to be Messiah. There were Old Testament prophecies that indicated the Messiah, as the king to come in the line of David would, as good kings in the past had done, accomplish the renovation of the temple and cleanse it from all improper worship. But they cannot and will not believe this Rabbi from Galilee is that promised one. And His actions which they perceive as hostile and an attack on their authority infuriate them. So, they are saying, ***"If you really are the Messiah you are claiming to be, let's see a miracle, a sign from God, that you operate with His special anointing and blessing!"***

**John 2:19-20 <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, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"**

These Jewish leaders hear Jesus' answer and evaluate it with the human wisdom that stands separate from God's wisdom. Because they don't believe in who Jesus has proclaimed Himself to be, they lack the Holy Spirit, who is the source of wisdom that is higher and greater than their own. What they hear is Jesus claiming that if the entire temple complex was destroyed, He personally and by Himself could rebuild it in three days. King Herod, the ruler when Jesus was a baby had been at work restoring, renovating, and expanding the temple complex. He was turning it into a beautiful and magnificent place in a futile attempt to win over the Jews. Even after his death the renovation project had continued for 46 years. And it still wasn't totally completed yet. So, Jesus' claim, to them, was the height of complete foolishness.

## **Jesus Removing the Clutter from Your Life**

**John 2:21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body.**

But Jesus response could not and would not be totally understood until after His death and resurrection. Even though He would go on to do miraculous things with the authority that could only come from God and teach with the authority that showed Him to be the Word of God in the flesh, the clearest sign of who He truly is was declared to the world in His suffering and death. He endured punishment that no ordinary man could ever tolerate. He suffered God's wrath for the sins of mankind, every single human being that ever lived or would live. He suffered for my sins and yours. He gave His life to remove all of the sinful clutter from your life that separates you from the true worship of God. Only God who became human could do that.

The temple was the place where the Passover Lamb was to be sacrificed. Yet He Himself was that Passover Lamb, and His death was the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Being the Son of God (divine) and the Son of Man (human) meant that His body, more so than the temple building of Herod, was the true dwelling place of God on earth. It was the most intimate way that God had ever dwelt with His sinful creation. And in the resurrection, He showed all mankind the true restored, cleansed, and glorified temple of God.

**Romans 6:3-4 <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? <sup>4</sup>We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**

In your baptism through the indwelling Holy Spirit, you are united intimately with that resurrected and cleansed Holy Temple of God, dying to sin and rising to a new life now, with the hope of eternal life to come.

**1 Corinthians 1:30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,**

By the faith you received in your baptism, by the faith that is renewed in you every time you hear the Gospel Message, you are in Christ Jesus who is the wisdom of God, the righteousness, the sanctification, and the redemption, all for you. The righteousness: He has taken away all that would prevent you from being God's precious child, so that in Him God declares you to be in right standing before Him. He is your sanctification, in Him and through faith in Him, you grow in your knowledge of who God is, and how He desires for you to live as His child. You not only know His will for you as expressed in the 10 commandments, but You are empowered to live them out. You live them out not in a legalistic way, but through the gift of sacrificial love that only comes from Christ. He teaches you how to love God first place in your life, and loving others second place. You don't do this to be saved, because you already are. You have been redeemed by His blood from the kingdom of death placed into the kingdom of life, life with Christ now, and the eternal life to come. He has removed the clutter of sin from you now and forever.

## **Remaining Clutter Free in a Clutter Filled World**

But how on earth are we to remain clutter free temples of God in a world that is filled with clutter, in a world that wants to fill your life with clutter? Clutter that is the busyness of the world, clutter that is our fear of COVID-19 and death? Clutter that is our new habit of worshipping at home out of convenience instead of gathering together with God's people as He designed His Church to be? We need to remain connected to our Savior and His work to keep our lives uncluttered. We need to be renewed in the power of His Spirit who works through the Word to reorder the priorities of our life so that they match God's will and plan for us. We need to avail ourselves of the power and promise that He is truly present in a supernatural and sacramental way when we gather around His Word and His Sacraments. We need the cleansing power of Confession and Absolution. We need Jesus to keep coming into our hearts and lives to clear out that sinful clutter and restore us to worshipping Him in Spirit and in truth.

### **Conclusion**

We all have a problem with clutter. It's a weekly exercise for me to clear off my desk. It's a daily exercise for me to clear the clutter from my heart and mind through the Holy Spirit working in God's Word. It's a weekly exercise to allow my Lord and Savior into my body and soul through the Sacrament of the Altar to clear the sinful clutter from me and draw me closer to Him. He comes to me and through repentance and helps me set my priorities straight, so that my life revolves around love for Him first, love for others second, and love for myself third. How can you keep you mind and your soul uncluttered? Make sure you continue to invite Him in, whether it be gathering here in person, or worshipping online for now; whether it be private Devotional study at home with your family, and/or joining with your brothers and sisters in person in the Fellowship Hall, or on Zoom, or watching the recorded studies on YouTube. Give the Holy Spirit a chance to be present in Your life so He can work to unclutter it. Give Him the opportunity to guide you and provide you with assurance on when its safe for you to return to Him in corporate worship and fellowship. Jesus has come to remove the clutter. And He will keep you clutter free until eternal life to come. Amen