

Written Copy: John 2:14-19 “Cleansing Our Temple”

3rd Sunday in Lent
Sunday, March 3rd, 2024

Text: John 2:14-19

¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. 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. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ 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.”

The text’s intent

Reveal Jesus as the true Messianic King who has come to restore faithful worship of the LORD in His temple. He cleanses the current temple from the worship of the god of Mammon and declares Himself to be the true location of God among men. It will be in His body as the temple where the final sacrifice for sin, the one that all the animal sacrifices pointed to, will take place. As the Messiah, He has the authority to cleanse the temple. And through His death and resurrection He will establish the temple where God is to be worshiped no longer as the site in Jerusalem, but throughout the world wherever His real presence is found and confessed through Word and Sacrament.

Focus Statement:

Jesus as the Messianic King came not only to cleanse the temple in Jerusalem, but to be the perfect cleansed temple of God on earth by being the place where the final sacrifice for sin would take place, in His body on the cross. The power of His death and resurrection is the cleansing power for each believer to be the home of His Spirit. As we gather together united by His Spirit through our confession of Him as Lord and Savior, wherever His real presence is through Word and Sacrament we find the true temple of God, His Church on earth.

Function Statement:

Why it’s important to know:

The traders and moneychangers were worshipping the god of mammon in the Lord’s Temple. We do the same when we allow the gods of culture, and ourselves to become as important or more important than Him, especially as seen in the way we steward our time, talents, and treasures.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Make use of His power to cleanse us from our idol worship through Confession and Absolution. Understand that each one of us united by His Spirit is a part of His new temple, His Church. It is located not in building, but wherever we come together to hear His words of Law and Gospel proclaimed and His Sacraments rightly administered.

Subject Sentence: Jesus presence in Word/Sacrament Is our temple

Introduction: Keeping a Clean House

I imagine most of us enjoy a clean house. Now when I say clean, I'm not talking about a house with no clutter, although that is nice too. But if you're like me, in the business of life, clutter accumulates pretty rapidly. And if you are someone who doesn't like to throw things away, it can accumulate exponentially.

But when it comes to dirt, to clean floors especially, that is something we all strive for. That's why this is a hard time of year coming up if you have a dog. The backyard at the Parsonage has a lot of mud. And when the ground isn't frozen Gideon likes to dig. And when his brother comes over for a visit it's even worse. Then you have to big galoots tracking in mud. You can try to wipe their feet off with a rag, but the mud gets packed in between their toes. Mud and dirt then gets on the floor, the sofa, the bed. That's not to mention the mud that gets on the bottom of my feet when I'm out in the yard playing with him.

Thankfully we don't have a problem with mud and dirt here in our Sanctuary. And we are blessed with a wonderful cleaning lady named Kathleen that keeps the floors in the Sanctuary, the Narthex, the Fellowship Hall, and the bathrooms looking and smelling clean. Having a clean house of worship is how we show our love and our respect for our Lord and Savior who we gather to worship in this place.

Jesus Cleansing the Temple

If you look at our Gospel Lesson in the ESV Bible, the heading reads "Jesus Cleanses the Temple". Now we don't see Jesus bringing in a broom and dustpan, or mop and bucket, or even a vacuum cleaner into the temple. He's not concerned with that kind of dirt. But He certainly is upset. He's angry. I would guess He's angrier than you are when someone or some dog tracks dirt on you clean floors at home, unless you've found yourself making a whip and chasing the offender out of the house.

Is He angry because there are animals present making a mess in God's house? After all they were probably not trained to go outside the temple to go bathroom, although more than likely the sellers of the sheep and oxen put down straw for that very purpose. Especially at this time of year, which was Passover, animals were no strangers to the temple. Lambs were taken all the way into the inner temple courtyard, right up to the bronze altar of sacrifice. And there the priests would slaughter them and sprinkle the blood before the altar as part of the sacrifice God's Word commanded for the Passover celebration. The lamb's blood was shed in the place of the person offering it, to forgive their sins, and in remembrance of how the Israelites in Egypt spread a lamb's blood on the doorposts of their house so that the Angel of Death passed over them. Animals being sacrificed at the altar that sits before the Holy Place in the temple would be a very messy affair indeed.

The cleansing Jesus came to perform was spiritual cleansing. When He entered the temple, He discovered things going on that were in direct violation of the 1st Commandment that we read as part of our Old Testament Lesson: **Exodus 20:2-3** ² **“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”** ³ **“You shall have no other gods before me.** What god were these sellers of animals and moneychangers worshiping? They were engaged in worshipping the god of greed, the god of avarice, the god of mammon.

Now it's not that what they were doing was completely and inherently evil. Passover was one of the three festivals that all Jewish men were required to attend in Jerusalem. And because it was a celebration many brought their families. They came from all over the Roman Empire, some traveling quite a distance. To have to guide a lamb or an ox on such a long journey would be a burdensome, if not impossible affair, especially if you needed to get it there in good shape to be an acceptable sacrifice to offer to the Lord. So, these sellers of animals offered ones that were acceptable, for a price. And one could expect them to sell these animals at a rate that would pay for their upkeep as well as to support their livelihood and families. Likewise with the moneychangers. People in their everyday life throughout the Roman Empire used Roman currency to pay for things. So that the monetary offerings that God's Law called for might be given in the appropriate amount, Roman currency needed to be exchanged for temple currency.

But of course, whenever human beings are involved, the temptation to charge more than what they rightly should is always there. The temptation to cheat and pull a fast one on the unsuspecting is always there. It's the same gimmick that we suspect the stereotypical used car salesman of using, pulling a fast one on the unsuspecting customer. People living close enough to bring their own lambs to the temple might be stopped and told, “That lamb is really not good enough to be a Passover sacrifice. You give it to me, and for a price I will sell you one of mine that is.” That lamb that was deemed “not good enough” is put into the pen, until the next unsuspecting worshiper comes along, and it becomes their perfect lamb, for a price of course. This is how a useful and needed enterprise becomes the worship of the god of greed, avarice, and mammon.

But that in and of itself is not the total offense. Jesus points this out in **John 2:16** “**do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.**” Jesus is addressing this to all of those who are trading animals and exchanging coinage. And not just to them, He is also addressing the chief priests and religious leaders who were allowing it to happen. This is the reason Jesus was angry enough to do a very un-Jesus like thing: make a weapon out of pieces of rope and chase people and animals from the temple. It’s why He first dumped the money-changers coins out of their containers and then overturned their tables. They were doing all this in the place where the LORD God alone was supposed to be worshiped. Instead, they were worshipping the false god of their own greed. In the place where all people, including Gentiles could come and pray, the noise and the clutter of animals and sellers and bartering and coins was preventing that from happening.

Jesus’ zeal was for all people to be able to worship the Father. These activities belonged in the marketplace, not the temple. So, Jesus acted according to His love of the Father and His desire that all people worship Him by putting a quick and decisive end to that which was cluttering up and preventing worship, both in a physical sense and spiritual

But this zeal was not appreciated by the religious authorities that had charge of what happened in the temple precinct: the priests and the ruling elders, all of whom received their cut from the money made by the sellers and money changers. So, they challenge Jesus’ authority to kick out those they have allowed to be there. In their asking Jesus for a sign, they are in effect saying “Who are you, what authority do you have to do these things? Give us a sign that shows you have the authority that supersedes our own!” And Jesus gives them the greatest sign.

Jesus Creating the New Temple Built W/O Hands

John 2:19-21 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.

There was a truth standing before them, a reality that they and even His disciples would not be able to totally comprehend this side of the resurrection. The temple used to be the place where God’s real presence dwelt, above the Ark of the Covenant in the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. God’s presence departed just before the Babylonians destroyed the temple almost 600 years earlier. The Ark of the Covenant was now gone, never to reappear again. And the real presence of the Lord had never returned; not until Jesus entered that temple in Jerusalem.

On that day, the true temple of God, where His real presence was located on earth, was right there in that man standing before them: Jesus of Nazareth. And the perfect sacrifice, the one that all of the other sacrifices of lambs and rams and pigeons pointed to, would be when Jesus of Nazareth suffered and died, shedding His own blood, as the perfect sacrifice for all mankind. And the confirming sign that this was true would be when Jesus would do what no man had ever done before: rise up from the dead, never to die again.

His blood shed on the cross was the power behind the lambs' blood in Egypt to save the firstborn from the angel of death. His blood shed on the cross was the power behind every animal sacrifice people ever gave to grant them forgiveness of sins. And His shed blood is the power to forgive every one of your sins, and my sins; all of them.

Cleansing Our Temple

So, where is God's temple now? The one in Jerusalem has been destroyed for over 2,000 years. The body of Jesus of Nazareth has ascended to be with the Father. But His real presence, His saving power made known and at work is still among us. It's right here. It's here where God's Word of Law and Gospel are rightly proclaimed. It's here, where His Sacraments of Holy Baptism and the Lord's Supper are rightly administered. It's here, because in these things Jesus has promised to be here, really and truly here; cloaked in His means of grace. He is here, and wherever across the globe that His Word is rightly preached and confessed, and His Sacraments rightly administered.

And because He is here, His work of cleansing the temple continues on to this day. It continues on in each one of us. Just like those sellers of animals and moneychangers, we have our own gods that we worship too. I know what some of them are in my life. How can you identify them in yours? They are whatever and whomever you place as most important in your life; those things that either stand on the same level as God or above Him. We can easily see them when we examine how we live as steward managers of God's gracious gifts. They are those things that we give our time, our efforts and skills and talents, and our pocketbook to above and before our service to the Lord. It's when our political party affiliations and stance on social issues, our friends and family, our time devoted to social media and Facebook; it's when pleasing ourselves is more important than our relationship with Jesus Christ, our worshipping Him, and our living out His command to love Him alone and love one another as He has loved us. It's all the things that clutter our lives and block our relationship with LORD as His beloved Children; those are our gods.

These things defile us from who He has called us to be: His disciples, His Church, His baptized children of the Heavenly Father. And He is here, this very hour, coming to you through Word and Sacrament, to continue to cleanse you and me from these sins, and to restore us as beloved members of His Church. The Spirit is at work pointing to this clutter, pointing this spiritual dirt, pointing to our sin, and then pointing us to Jesus shedding His blood on the cross. He is at work establishing and strengthening and our faith that in Jesus perfect sacrifice all our sin is forgiven, all our dirt removed, all the clutter swept away. And He points to Jesus' resurrection as our confirming sign. Because of the work of His Spirit here today you and I stand as cleansed, made suitable building blocks in His temple on earth made without hands, His Church.

Conclusion

Brooms and dust pans, mops and buckets, and vacuum cleaners are important tools to clean the dirt away in this place and in our homes. But all of us need spiritual cleansing. And all of us have that happening continually through the cleansing power of Jesus blood shed for you and me. It comes to you through His gift of faith. It comes to you over and over again in this place through His Word and Sacrament. It's His gift to you to make you His perfect building blocks in His temple on earth. It's His gift of faith that calls you and makes you a member of His body on earth His Church. And He is at work to keep you cleansed throughout your time in this world, all the way unto eternal life to come. Amen.