

Rev. Dan Welch Lent 3 3-4-18

Text- John 2:13-22

Today's Gospel lesson delivers a different kind of Jesus than the gentle, friendly Jesus that we're used to hearing about. We have many paintings of Jesus in our church and school. And as I've looked around in all of the Sunday School rooms, the school classrooms, the hallways, and the Fellowship Center, I can't say I ever recall seeing a painting or a poster portraying the scene in today's Gospel! It's not exactly the most comforting picture to welcome people, especially our littlest ones, into God's house, is it? No, this definitely isn't the Jesus we see in our paintings of Him gently holding a little lamb in His arms, or smiling and welcoming all the children who are surrounding Him. Jesus as we see Him in today's Gospel reading is flush with anger, His face is red, a whip of cords in His hand, flipping over tables, and dumping money boxes on the floor. This Jesus is consumed with righteous zeal for the temple, His Father's house.

I once saw a cartoon that pictured a young boy who had just gone on a rampage through the ladies' bake sale in the church fellowship center. Cookies and pies scattered all over the floor. Money poured out, coins spread out everywhere. And his mother comes and grabs him by the scruff of the neck and says, "What in the world are you doing?" And the little boy answers, "I learned this in church today Mom, and you've always told me to ask myself, 'What would Jesus do?'"

At this point, let me say in this case, as you come to the silent and live auctions for First Lutheran School today, **please** do **not** do what Jesus did in today's Gospel lesson! These are legitimate, and completely voluntary ways to support our Christian Day School! Unlike at the ancient temple in Jerusalem, no one here is being cheated out of anything! What's more, no one is trying to get you to buy God's favor with your purchases! So, let's go back to the Temple in Jerusalem and see what was really going on that caused Jesus to unleash His righteous anger!

The Gospel writer John tells us this incident took place right away after Jesus' began His earthly ministry. He had just performed His first miracle of changing water into wine at a wedding feast. Now, it was time for the Passover. This was the time when people came

from all over the land of Israel and beyond to celebrate the Passover meal and make sacrifices. The Law said that if you had to travel a long way, you could buy your sacrificial animal in Jerusalem instead of dragging it along with you. And the money changers were there to exchange out of town currency for **temple** currency, because currency used in the temple must not be foreign, from a non-Jewish country.

Jesus saw something else though. He saw His Father's house being **misused** and **abused**. It was being turned into a market, a shopping mall of religion. Jesus seemed especially upset with the pigeon sellers. Pigeons were the sacrifice to be given by poor people, instead of the more costly sheep or oxen. These merchants were preying on the **poor** for profit. Swindlers were having a field day in the house of the Lord!

Nothing irritates Jesus more than faithless religion. Faithless sacrifices. Bargaining, dealing, transacting in the Name of God. All of it in some vain attempt to atone for your sins by your own self-chosen sacrifices. And it still goes on today. The money changers and sacrifice sellers of our day have changed their bill of goods to accommodate more modern tastes in religion. Now they sell motivation and purpose and self-improvement, all in the Name of God. All this can be yours if you just hand over your \$40.

Behind all of this is the business of transaction, cutting deals with God. It's at the heart of all false religion, the idea that **we need** to do something to make ourselves acceptable to God, to atone for our sins, to get on God's good side. It's the notion that God has done His part and now He's waiting around for **you** to do yours. In short, it's the idea that there is some way to have a life other than in the death and resurrection in Jesus (which is the whole reason for Christ's coming to Earth). Let's face it - death and resurrection is not a path you and I would willingly choose for ourselves, is it? At the heart of all this, it's a failure to recognize how grim our situation really is. We like to think we're doing pretty well and we're getting better. But then we get a quick refresher course on our awful, sinful situation straight from Mt. Sinai. Here's what God tells us there:

- You shall have no other gods. (**Nothing** comes before Him!)

- You shall not misuse God's Name. (Not even when you're angry or you stub your toe!)
- Remember the Sabbath day (which means, do not neglect to hear, learn and to grow in God's Word, and to worship)
- Honor your father and mother. (Show respect to them and all the authorities God has put over you.)
- Don't murder, commit adultery, steal. (Don't even think about it.)
- Don't lie about others. (which means don't do anything to hurt another person's reputation.)
- Don't want things you can't have that other people have.

And all these commandments we are to obey not just in **actions**, but also in words and thoughts. The terrible truth is, we **can't** measure up to what God demands from us. And so we invent our own religion, ways to bribe and butter up God so that He'll overlook this mess we've made of our lives. Old Testament Israel treated the sacrifices that way- they turned them into religious obligations and duties, stuff you had to do to get on God's good side. That's not what the sacrifices were ever meant for. They weren't bribes. Do you really think you can bribe God with a sheep, a pigeon, or a check in the offering plate? Think again.

The sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament were really intended to teach the Israelites how to live vicariously, literally to live off the death of another. The blood of the **animal** stood for **your** life. That was bad news for the lamb, but very **good** news for you. It was a training in trust. God was teaching people to live on His **promise** and not **their** works. Yes, you brought your sheep, or bought one from the local sheep seller. But the gift of forgiveness and life was God's to give through the blood of the Lamb. It was more a gift from God than it was a work you do.

But the Israelites flipped things upside down and made God's work **their** work. They turned a gift into a transaction where God does His part and you do yours and together you work out the terms of your salvation. Jesus completely turns the tables on that kind of religion. (Literally!)

The Jews ask for a sign from Jesus. 'By what authority do you do these things?' What

Jesus had done was an act of messianic proportions. You don't just go into the temple courts and start turning things upside down. They want a sign that Jesus is actually the Messiah, the Promised Anointed One from God who can legitimately do these things. So Jesus gives them a sign. He says: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." How's that for a sign? His own resurrection from the dead.

But when they hear Him say, "temple" they're thinking about a building. They say, 'What are you talking about? It's taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it in three days?' But the "temple" Jesus was talking about was the temple of His own **body**. The true temple where God meets man is His own human flesh born of Mary. **This** is where today **you** meet God face to face. Not in a building, but in the crucified, risen, and glorified body of Jesus Christ. Here God and man are united as one Person. Here, in His Word and Sacraments, sins are forgiven. Here the dead are raised. This is where your life is, not in a building, but in the body of Christ.

Jesus is the true and ultimate temple, where God puts His Name to save us, where God makes His dwelling with people, where the Father is worshipped in Spirit and in Truth. Where the body of Jesus is, **that's** where God forgives and blesses. It happens right here, among us, where sinners are **baptized** into the Triune Name of God, where sinners **hear** the full and entire forgiveness of their sins, where sinners **eat and drink** the body and blood of Christ for their forgiveness.

The church is the temple of God. Not a building but a gathering of people in whom the Lord lives! It's an assembly, a congregation gathered around the Word and the Lord's Supper. Peter wrote, "You (the baptized) like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Yes, the church is God's temple built on the crucified and risen body of Jesus.

After Jesus rose from the dead and the disciples saw Him, ate with Him, touched Him, they remembered what Jesus said that day in front of the temple. They remembered the psalm of David, that zeal for the Lord's house would

consume Him. And, reflecting on everything, they trusted the Scripture and the word Jesus spoke. You and I can do no better this morning, than to leave here trusting God's Word, which tells us of Christ's death and resurrection, and believing the word Jesus speaks to **you** here - "I forgive you all of your sins." "This is my body given for you." "This is my blood shed for you."

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." That's exactly what happened. Jesus was crucified. The temple of His body was destroyed in death in order to save the world. And in three days, He conquered death! He rose from the dead! Death and resurrection is the way of God's temple, the body of Christ, and you. Because He lives you will live forever. Amen.