

Mar 11, 2012

John 2:13-25

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

²³When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

John 2:13-25 – Cleansing of the Temple

The Cleansing of the Temple. That is what today's Gospel is called in my Bible. Jesus was cleansing the Temple and it was a major house clean.

In a few parishes where I have served, some springs, we had a cleaning party. We would bring out the ladder, the buckets, and the Murphy's Oil. One time we even bought one of those magic swiffer mops. One lucky person who was not afraid of heights would climb up to reach the cobwebs in the window above the altar. The rest would scrub and polish below.

Some of you have been involved in the cleansing of our temple right here. We are thankful for the volunteers who have given their time and energy to do the housekeeping in the past.

Jesus was cleaning house in this morning's Gospel. But his was a tumultuous approach. Jesus was not only passionate...he was angry...so angry that he made a whip of cords and drove out the sheep and cattle. Enraged, he spilled out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. This is not the picture of our Lord that we usually imagine, is it? This is not the suffering servant who washed his disciples' feet, who was publicly beaten and executed on a cross.

Why was Jesus so angry? Well...it was Passover, the greatest festival of the Jewish year. Thousands of pilgrims came to Jerusalem and went up to the magnificent temple. People believed that the Presence of the Lord actually resided in the 'Holy of the Holies' in the heart of the temple.

Passover celebrated their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, led by Moses. Particularly they remembered the night the Angel of death **passed over** Jewish houses marked by the blood of a sacrificed lamb. People continued to sacrifice animals to pay for their sins. If you were rich, you could buy a cow or a sheep. If you were not so rich, you bought a dove. These animals were supposed to be without blemish. People traveling from far away couldn't bring animals long distances, so the custom of buying your sacrifice right at the temple began. Foreign money also had to be changed into local currency. Money changers set up shop right there in the temple...to make it convenient for people. Some say they charged unfair rates. They exploited the pilgrims, contaminating themselves and the temple with their greed and dishonesty.

Jesus didn't chase away just a few sheep and cattle. It is likely there were hundreds of beasts because there were thousands of people. It was a miracle in itself that he was able to do it.

All this was going on. But I think there was a larger issue which Jesus was confronting the day he cleared the temple.

Has anyone seen the movie 'Dead Poets' Society'? There's a scene at the beginning where Robin Williams, the new resolutely defiant teacher, orders his class to rip an essay on understanding poetry out of their books. The essay shows how to rate poems and even how to chart them on a graph. Williams, the teacher, says that this is nonsense because poetry is not subject to a formula.

In the same way, Jesus was demonstrating that day in the temple that God is not subject to a formula in Mosaic law, nor is God found in one particular Temple. God cannot be manipulated. God's favour cannot be gained by animal sacrifices. God is mystery and can not be reduced to a human formula.

Although Jesus was shaking with rage that day...What he was demonstrating in driving out the beasts, upturning the tables and spilling the coins was a message of **hope**.

He was offering them and **us** something new...a new sacrifice to really clean us...the sacrifice of himself, ...a once and for all sacrifice, a sacrifice without price, a sacrifice without blemish...no more animals...no more coins and crooked money changers. These had not done the trick...their formula for canceling out sin was not on the mark.

He was offering them a new temple as well, a living temple - his body! This was revolutionary! God was to be found in a body, not in a building.

Jesus, in the heart of Judaism, the Temple, reveals this: that Jesus as our Saviour, makes the ritual institutions of Judaism obsolete. Jesus heralds a new era, a new way to know God, not God in the 'holy of holies', the inner sanctum of the temple, but God embodied, one of us; God who dies for us, God who rises, raising us with him, forgiven...spirit bearers.

Paul later writes

"Do you not know that **you** are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" Not only does God not dwell in a house of block and stones, but God lives in you. You are God's temple now...you and I. We are each signs of God's presence in the world. Now isn't that amazing? You are the place where God's glory can be seen and God's mercy can be made known. Our words and deeds tell of the cross of Jesus Christ. These become the tools God uses to rebuild this world, even as we wait for God's new heaven and earth.

Ephesians says Christ is the cornerstone. In him the whole structure joins together and grows into a holy temple. We are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. We participate in this structure...we are now living units in it.

This is Lent and Jesus is cleaning house.

‘Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.’ Says the Psalm.

Lent is about cleaning our hearts. We cannot do it though...it is only our Lord Jesus who can. He’s the one who can overturn the tables and drive out what needs not be there. Lent is a time to celebrate Our Lord’s offering himself; an act of love which truly wipes us clean.

So our prayer this Lent can be that our Lord will do it again in our hearts, in our churches, and in the world. Turn our lives upside down and right our world once again Lord. Amen.