

Cleansing of the Temple

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Three times a year – spring, summer, and fall – Israelites were sure to make a pilgrimage to go to the Temple in Jerusalem where the population would grow to be rather large. Coming from all over, they offered sacrifices to God in return for what He had done for them, remembering their deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the Torah, and remembering their ancestors who once lived out in the desert.

During Jesus' time, the Temple in Jerusalem was under reconstruction, which began by King Herod around 20 B.C. in order to appease the Jewish nation. You can only imagine the number of people in and near the Temple and its courts as people came to offer sacrifices to God. Under the old sacrificial system, unblemished animals were inspected by the priests so they wouldn't offend God. So a system was developed where sacrificial animals were prepositioned next to the Temple, already inspected, and ready for those who came in from the countryside. Some say this routine practice of convenience under the old sacrificial system generated a profit. After all, who wanted to cart an animal all the way into Jerusalem where it was crowded, only to be turned away because it was found to have a blemish?

Now, Jesus had been coming to the Temple in Jerusalem ever since He was a small child. And reading our text, you can tell that He didn't like it. Why? Because He knew that this wasn't what God had in mind. The Temple was where God would reside. A holy place where God and His people could meet together. A place of renewed life and Divine blessing. But instead, it had become filled with people going through the motions of a false sacrificial religion. After Jesus got ***"...In the temple, He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money-changers there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and oxen. He poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take***

these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." (John 2:14-16) This wasn't the meek and mild Jesus that most of us remember when we grew up in Sunday School. The text goes on to say that, ***"His disciples remembered [in Psalm 69:9] that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'***" It makes you wonder if they remembered it at that moment or after they had time to reflect. The disciples didn't always understand Jesus and His actions when they took place, and so you can only imagine what the disciples were thinking when they saw the chaos that began.

After all, God's house is His house. Just like His church is not ours, but rather His. And the church is His means of delivering grace to His people. But when Jesus came into the Temple, not only did it need to be reconstructed, but it also needed to be razed to the ground altogether so that a new Temple might be established altogether. This is the kind of zeal that Jesus had that day. It underscores how important the relationship with God and His people is to Him. Worship is sacred – a time and place - where God and man come together. The kind of zeal that Jesus displayed, as Luther once wrote, ***"[didn't come from] an angry love or a jealous love...His anger does not rise from hatred; it comes from...love of God."***

As we hear this passage and reflect on our own worship, are there times that we haven't always kept worship with God sacred? Certainly, we enjoy the time with God and with our Christian brothers and sisters, but sometimes - our thoughts, words, and actions - haven't always reflected the sacredness of worship – meeting with God Himself..

While some have followed federal, state, and local health guidelines during the pandemic and have watched our worship at home, others have decided to come in the building to worship. But then again, regardless of where you're at, each of us can easily get distracted at times during worship. We can start to think of the things that we need to get done later in the day, we wonder if the worship service will be an hour or less, and we can become distracted by what someone said or did, rather than focusing on worship. And, with so many distractions going on around us, it's no wonder that people struggle to believe that Jesus has authority in their lives. Like the Jews in our text, we look for a sign. ***"What sign do you show us for doing these things?"*** Where is the visible proof of Your authority Jesus? And yet, Jesus says to them and us, ***"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."*** ***"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up."*** These are

the words spoken by witnesses at His trial, words they remembered Him saying as they testified against Him. They thought He was referring to the Temple of Jerusalem when, in actuality, Jesus was speaking of His own body. For He had come from the Father to replace that old sacrificial system that no longer served its purpose. And yet, when He said them, Jesus was telling them that He would become that perfect sacrificial lamb who would suffer and die - for the sins of all. His Body, His Temple was crucified on Calvary's cross by us, for your sins and my sins, as well as the sins of the whole world. And He would raise it up again, after three days, so that death would no longer have dominion over us.

Jesus was sharing the Good News of His glorious death and resurrection with them. But sadly, those who heard Him that day missed the point. Just like they missed the point of being in a relationship with God and meeting with Him at worship. Jesus is the temple where divine blessings are bestowed, and where lives can be renewed once again. Jesus is literally the place where God and man meet. And yet for some reason, we can miss this point at times as well. Because so often, when we hear this passage in the Word of God, we focus on righteous anger instead of the zealous loving relationship that Jesus has for God and man to be able to come together. And we've missed the point if we come to church and wonder why we're still trying to fill that void in our hearts. Or even worse, we no longer long for God to fill that void because we've allowed other things to fill it up. If that's the case for you during this Lenten season, maybe it's time to reflect on how you're meeting with God and repent of those things that you're allowing to prevent you from truly worshipping Him. Because even during the pandemic, the Spirit has seen fit for us to be able to worship. And it's by His Spirit, that we're able to see the kind of zealous love that God has for us, to be able to worship Him with our whole heart and being.

Now, I want to tell you that while the church has "business" affairs to attend to, the Lord is still the Lord of the church. And as such, it operates differently than many places of business. It's where God delivers to us - His people - His means of grace. Jesus is present through His Word. He is present in the blessings that are given. When people are washed in the waters of Holy Baptism...present in/with/under the bread and the wine... it's His Spirit that dwells within us to lead us back to Him again and again. And it's His zeal that dwells within us and in our relationship with God, through His sacrificial presence, that we're able to worship God the Father,

becoming part of His body, so that by His Spirit, He might remain in our hearts and minds, and each one of us might become: ***“a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.”*** (Romans 12:1)

You know, even before the time when Jesus walked this earth, people made a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem at least three times a year. And even though Herod’s Temple was being reconstructed to bring back some of the glory of Solomon’s Temple, the Temple in Jerusalem really was God’s Temple. And now today, through Jesus, His Temple is the place where God and man come together. It’s a place of sanctuary for us, where we can pray and hear God speaking to us. And even though Our Savior’s Way has beautiful stone columns, white walls, and dark wood, as well its beautiful stained-glass windows, what matters most is what God has done for us through Jesus. Doing away with the old sacrificial system, and bringing about a new one through Jesus, He fills that void between God and man. Jesus is the One who is prominently figured on the center stain glass of the sanctuary at Our Savior’s Way. And while we can worship Him whenever or wherever we wish, today we remember that we’re fortunate to be able to gather in His name and worship Him - here in this place, as well as in eternity.

In Jesus’ name, Amen.