

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt  
Third Sunday of Lent - Year B  
53rd Week of Pandemic  
St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
Exodus 20:1-17  
Psalm 19  
1 Corinthians 1:18-25  
John 2:13-22  
03/07/2021

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making 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. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <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, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After 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.

The Gospel of Our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

### **Reverence**

Good morning! I haven't always been the biggest fan of this week's Gospel lesson. The reason for this is the way that this text can be easily misunderstood. A great example of this was when I was in YoungLife. Now, if you have never heard of YoungLife, it's an inter-denominational outreach program for kids in high school. I was part of my area's group for all of High School and then as a "leader" for most of college. Now the whole point of YoungLife was to teach kids who had never been to church the core of the Christian message. So every week during what they called "club" a leader would spend about 10 minutes talking about that very topic. One of the ways we would do that is through what we called "person of Christ" talks where we would use a passage from the Bible to explain what Jesus was like. One might use the passage of the man with the withered hand to talk about how compassionate Jesus can be, for example.

But leaders would also use this story, any of the forms found in the four Gospels, to make a point that I was never that comfortable with. The point they would often try to make is that Jesus is portrayed as this weak and gentle guy walking around with a lamb under one arm and a meal for someone in need in the other. They would then go on to read this story and portray Jesus in what I can only categorize as an action movie hero.

But that's not what this text is about at all. I'm not saying that Jesus doesn't respond with anger, but that's a far cry from the violent portrayals that others have given. So, let's take a closer look. The first thing to notice is the placement of this text within the Gospel as a whole. In Matthew, Mark,

and Luke the story can be found at the end of the Gospel. It serves as a catalyst for the Jewish leaders who decide that they need to get rid of this Jesus guy who causes trouble wherever he goes. But here in John, the story takes place at the beginning of the Gospel. Because of this, it serves a very different function. While it certainly doesn't make Jesus popular with the Jewish leaders of the Temple, the goal here in the beginning of John is about having an appropriate attitude and demeanor for our experience with God, throughout the rest of the Gospel.

Which brings us to the act itself. One of my favorite portrayals of the story is a comical old painting where the whip is very faded, so it looks like Jesus is pulling back to punch some terrified guy. This is exactly what DIDN'T happen. Jesus makes the whip to herd out the cattle and other animals, not to attack random people.

Another common mistake in understanding this text is that we think that money has no place in the church. But this isn't true either. Animal sacrifice was an everyday occurrence in religious temples, and it was incredibly challenging to care for an animal that would just be taken with you to the big city so you could have it killed for a sacrifice. So a lot of people would set aside money to buy an animal when they got to Jerusalem for their sacrifice. Jesus isn't objecting to the existence of this practice, but to where it was taking place.

The point that Jesus was making was that the Temple grounds were not the place for this activity to occur. For all Jews the understanding was that deep in the Temple in the Holiest of Holies God actually resided. This meant that the Temple was where God lived. Jesus wanted his community to take this seriously, and to show reverence and respect for the house of God. One commentator writes that *"for Jesus it is not merely a building*

*where people gather... degenerated into a marketplace; it is 'the house of my Father'... It is not not only an area where people gather to worship God, but a place among men and women where the God of Israel, who Jesus calls 'my Father,' has his dwelling."*<sup>1</sup>

And so once again Jesus takes the traditional understanding of how things are, and flips them upside down. Another scholar writes something that I found particularly convicting and challenging. *"Jesus' dramatic action in 2:13-16, through which he issued a radical challenge to the authority of the religious institutions of his day, issues a similar challenge to the institutionalism of the contemporary church. Christian faith communities must be willing to ask where and when the status quo of religious practices and institutions has been absolutized and, therefore, closed to the possibility of reformation, change, and renewal. The great danger is that the contemporary church, like the leaders of the religious establishments in the Gospel of John, will fall into the trap of equating the authority of its own institutions with the presence of God."*<sup>2</sup>

It seems that Jesus comes to us at all times and places to turn over the tables of complacency and challenge the ways we have become blind to the presence of God. More rules won't fix this. Instead, Jesus calls us to be open to the many ways that God is at work all around us, working in the world and transforming every bit of space into a home where God can dwell. So... are you looking around too? Are you ready? Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Moloney, Francis J., and Daniel J. Harrington. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1998. p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Keck, Leander E. *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary*. Volume 8. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2015. p. 466.