

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt
Third Sunday in Lent - Year B
St. Paul's Lutheran Church
Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm 19
I Corinthians 1:18-25
John 2:13-22
03/03/2024

Gospel

The Holy Gospel according to St. John:

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.

The Gospel of Our Lord

Prayer

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

Amen.

The Temple

Good morning! It's ironic that we're talking about the destruction of the temple today. In Sunday School for the past two weeks we have been reading Haggai, a short book in the Hebrew Scriptures that talks about the rebuilding of the Temple around the year 520 B.C.E. If anything, it shows just how important this place was for the Jewish people. That's something I think we often forget. So today, I thought it might help to put the lesson in perspective if we could spend some time talking about this historic building.

The first thing to realize is that the Temple was different from what we could call a synagogue. A synagogue was a place for local Jews to gather in cities and towns. There were many synagogues, but only ONE Temple. It was commonly believed, by all faiths, not just Judaism, that a temple was the dwelling place of the deity here on earth. This "dwelling place" has its roots in the ark of the covenant that was transported with the Israelites during their time in the wilderness. But it wasn't until the reign of King Solomon that the first Temple was built.

This first Temple stood for generations until the year 587 B.C.E. This is when the Babylonian empire took over Israel and Judea, sacking Jerusalem and destroying the Temple in the process. This was a huge blow for the Jewish population. Not only were the city and Temple wrecked and destroyed, but they also took all the leadership and shipped them across the empire. It isn't until Persia defeats Babylon decades later that these Jews and their descendants are allowed to return and begin the process of

rebuilding. This version is called the Second Temple and its rebuilding is what we just read about in Sunday School.

While the first Temple was important, this second one was even more so. It became a sign of hope for the Jewish people after so much loss and pain. It was a focal point for their worship and national pride.

But the Temple in our Gospel text today is actually the third version, often called Herod's Temple. That's because it was under his direction that it was constructed. Amazingly, he had the main worship area constructed in a year and a half. It was estimated at over 120 feet high and 120 feet long. But the most impressive part is what Herod added. In our text we are told that the Temple had been under construction for 46 years, but they really mean improvements and embellishments. The largest of these is the outer courtyard which you can see in the image that was in your bulletins. This is the area where Jesus makes a whip. Getting an exact number is tough, but I have heard that the whole Temple grounds covered an area of roughly 3-5 football sized fields. It was absolutely massive.

All Jews living in the area around Jerusalem were required to attend the major religious festivals at the Temple. They were also required to pay a Temple tax, but because they couldn't use money with an image of another god on them, they were unable to use the Roman currency. So the moneychangers job was to exchange the roman currency for shekels in the first courtyard. Temple sacrifice was the main form of worship for Jews, and this required a lot of animals. Because it was unfeasible to bring your own goat across the country for a sacrifice, you could also purchase varying animals in this courtyard too. They needed so many animals that my undergrad religious professor said that during major festivals like the Passover, there were literal creeks of blood running through the town.

Here is the really unfortunate part. The moneychangers and animal sellers either gave a bad exchange rate, or charged too much for the animals. THIS is why Jesus is so upset when he shows up. It wasn't so much that it was happening, but that people were being taken advantage of, people who had come to worship God.

By the time the Gospel of John is written, we're somewhere around the year 90-100 C.E. And it seems clear that the writer is part of a Jewish community. We forget that it isn't for another 50-100 years that we see an official break between the Jewish and Christian faith. So the Jewish believers in Christ that the Gospel of John is written for are struggling to understand two major events. The first is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The second is the destruction of the Temple. You see, around the year 70 C.E. Rome showed up to stop a Jewish rebellion. And the Romans were anything if not thorough. They absolutely crush this rebellion, and in the process they LEVEL the entire Temple grounds. ALL OF IT. They turn an area the size of several football fields into rubble. The only thing left standing when they leave town is one lone wall on the western side. We call that wall the Wailing Wall now.

Jesus knew that all human creations will eventually fail. And standing in a place of worship that had become a place where Jews were taken advantage of, he lashed out, literally, at the system. Jesus shows the people of the Temple, and us 2,000 years later, that our focus must always remain God.

We have gathered in this place to worship, but Jesus shows us that distractions are always all around us. Regardless of what we make it can be all too easy for us to get caught up on the earthly side of things, rather than focusing on the stillness and power of God. God desires a new place of

dwelling, a place in each of our own hearts. Sure, all of this around us is nice, but it's a moot point if we don't make place for God. Because, as we'll see, without God's wonderful work, none of this would even matter. Amen.