

7th March 2021 – LENT 3 – Chris's Sermon

John 2: 13-22

According to our gospel today, in the days leading up to the Passover, Jesus makes the journey to Jerusalem – he walks to the temple to pray. And, in the actions of Jesus we see his intention. Jesus goes to the temple to pray - to talk to God – to share his piety and devotion with the Father – it's a quiet time – a time for reflection and preparation and reverence.

But, according to our reading, the temple is not fit for that purpose – it's not a place where people gather to talk to God – it's not a place where the faithful gather to express their piety and devotion to the Father. It's not a quiet place (in other words, it's not a place of deep listening) – and it's not a place that encourages reflection or preparation or reverence.

Instead, Jesus discovered a marketplace – a place of commerce. In the words of our reading, "...in the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, doves and the money changers seated at their tables..." And Jesus was shocked by what he saw – and he was angry. He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.

For Jesus, the house of God was transformed into a place of industry (a place of worldly distractions) – it wasn't a place of worship (it wasn't a place that honoured God).

This was the context – the experience that prompted his teaching. According to our reading, Jesus was then questioned by the Jews – they asked him to explain his actions (and Jesus was more than happy to teach them – to set them straight). Jesus talked to the crowd about the temple of the true faith (he showed them what the house of God truly looks like).

He reminded the people that the temple wasn't dependent on a building or a location or even a specific ritual. Instead, he talked about a place of connection – a place of piety and prayer and devotion – a place of reflection and preparation and reverence.

Strengthened by these qualities and experiences, Jesus reminds the people that the temple of the true faith will endure – he reminds them that this temple is strong (it's the temple of the heart and mind). And, he questions the intention of the Jews - when they turn the house of God into a marketplace. He shows them that temple will only ever be cleaned and made holy when they return to God – when they attend to the teachings of their ancestors and purify their hearts and minds.

Nothing in this reading is quite what it seems to be. At first, Jesus seems to be talking about his outrage concerning the temple – his anger that the house of God had been defiled. But, as the reading progresses, we begin to see Jesus talk more about the fall of the people – and their need to be restored.

Jesus then talks about the temple of his own body – destroyed and rebuilt in three days – destroyed on the cross and resurrected through the grace of God. And, in this teaching, we see the change – Jesus stops talking about his cleaning of the temple and starts talking about God’s cleansing of the people (using Jesus as the broom).

So, in a sense, this is a very appropriate reading for us, as we continue our journey through lent – as we pause to give consideration to the faith that carries us forward.

In our first reading from Exodus, we celebrate the story of the ten commandments – the law given to the children of Israel to help them rediscover the temple of their faith (their relationship with God) – a God that they were called to carry with them – in their hearts and their minds. But, in our Gospel, we see that relationship corrupted and tarnished – we see the law and the true purpose of the temple hidden behind worldly distractions. And, again, the people needed to be saved from themselves – shown again the face of God.

This is a very appropriate reading for us, as we journey through lent – as we too pause to examine our surroundings – as we study the temple of our faith – a faith that lives within our hearts and minds. Today, our Lord reminds us that we create a temple fit for God when we give ourselves to God and search for God’s meaning and purpose in our lives (this is the same intention that we see in Jesus, when he walks to the temple to pray).

If the true temples of God are temples of the heart and mind and body – if the temples of God are built within us and within the hearts of the faithful, lent then becomes a time when we are encouraged to clean these temples. Through prayer and fasting – through reading and meditation, we clear away the cobwebs – we sift and sort – we set the priorities that will govern our lives, moving forward.

And, we do these things in preparation for Easter – in preparation for the time when we celebrate the power of a God who can rebuild the temple in three days.

In the words of Colossians chapter three, “...As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, humility and patience... forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And, let the peace of Christ rule your hearts... And, with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God. And, whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord – giving thanks to God the Father.

Surely this is the temple of the heart and mind that Jesus describes.

The Lord be with you.