

March 3, 2024

St. John 2:13-22:

Lessons at the Temple

- I. A Preview
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Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Dear Friends in Christ,

I was thinking back to the first time I saw a painting of what I call "the laughing Jesus." I was not impressed. Honestly, I found it offensive, especially in light of what Jesus said to Mary and Joseph after they found their twelve year old Son in the Temple: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's House (Lk.2:29)." Or, consider these words of Jesus, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword (Mt.10:34)." Or, how about these words, "Whoever finds his life (that is, devoted to this world) will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt.10:39)?" We do understand that from the beginning He knew His mission would take Him to the Cross, don't we?

That fits these words from our text: "And making a whip of cords, he drove them out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of moneychangers and overturned their tables (v.15)." This is the wrath of God. This muddies the many skewed pictures of Jesus - the laughing one - willing to compromise with the world. He is God who came to address the horror of sin. Savior? Definitely. Loving? Without question. Compassionate? Of course. Sugar sweet and unwilling to make hard confrontation? Never!

As we make our Lenten Journey, we know what's ahead: A bloody Cross. Our Journey continues with . . .

LESSONS AT THE TEMPLE

I. A Preview.

In one of his sermons, Martin Luther wrote:

Nowhere do we read that Christ experienced much joy during his earthly sojourn. This was due to the fact that his heart unremittently harbored this consuming zeal for the temple and the people of God. His was no self-seeking ire. This is evident from the words of the Gospel (Mt.23:37): "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I would have gathered your children together!" Those were not words of a laughing heart. But also this office of concern, of solicitude and zeal, was imposed on Him by His heavenly Father, and this zeal of His ceased only on the cross. (What Luther Says, Concordia Publishing House, #5095, p. 1567)

Our text begins with "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem (v.13)." The Passover, instituted some 1500 years before Christ walked the earth, foreshadowed the Blood of Christ to cover sin so that God would Passover all our sin; not hold our sin against us. After all, Christ is "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

We're told, "In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers there (v.14)." Those from out-of-town needed to present their sacrifices at the temple. Instead of dragging their oxen and sheep and pigeons, they could buy them at Jerusalem. But at the temple? The stench of animals, and the hawking of greedy sellers and money-changers at the temple?

And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade (vv.15,16)."

The first lesson at the Temple is a preview of Judgment Day. Though Jesus is outnumbered in every way - including popular opinion - nothing stops Him. The world and the now, the so-called "modern church" might deny it, might like to think massive opinion makes the Scriptures irrelevant. Jesus isn't laughing.

II. The Ultimate Sacrifice.

"His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house consumes me.'

"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore 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 (vv.17-21)."

I'm taking us back to Advent; specifically to the Advent Hymn, "On Jordan's Bank the Baptist's Cry," back to the second verse: "Then cleansed be life from every sin; Make straight the way for God within, And let us all our heart prepare for Christ to come and enter there." You see, that's what's happening in the temple this morning. The temple and temple worship were to be a picture of the coming Messiah, the Christ, our Lord Jesus. And He's there; the temple in the flesh standing in His temple that foreshadowed His First Coming; His becoming the ultimate sacrifice for all sin - *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*

His statement, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." points to His resurrection; points to His victory over sin, death, and hell; points to the promise He gives us: "because I live you also will live (Jn.14-19)." And this: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day (Jn.6:40)."

Over the past years a number of you have mentioned funerals you've attended for a loved one, and never heard a clear presentation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. Sin is rarely, if ever, mentioned. Salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ is seen as too negative. The lessons at the temple very clearly impress upon us that this is a world of sin and death and that Christ is the ultimate sacrifice for forgiveness.

Some of the most comforting words of Scripture regarding Christ as the Ultimate Sacrifice are these: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us (Rm.5:6-8)." And this from the Book of Hebrews: "But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins he sat down at the right hand of God (Heb. 10:12)."

III. The Third Lesson.

And that brings us to the third lesson; to put it in familiar words: Christian worship is serious business. Temple worship had been made over according to the want of success and prosperity, or, as Jesus said, "do not make my Father's house a house of trade." Throughout the history of the Old Testament worship, God's people moved through worship of the golden calf at the time of Moses to embracing the practices of pagan religions; namely the sacrificing of children, fornication with priests and priestesses to assure the fertility of crops, and highly charged emotional worship as in the case of the prophets of Baal at the time of Elijah in which we're told, "And they (the priests) cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until blood gushed out upon them, and as midday passed they raved on...(I Ki,18:28,29)." This is what happens when the Word is compromised. Worship becomes *want* and *emotion*; human worship. I'm not saying emotion is not involved. Emotion is the result of the Word. God forbid that we ever forget the words of Paul: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of salvation to everyone who believes...(Rm.1:16)." The gospel, the Word of God, not man's innovations and programs - *the gospel is the power of God.*

Jesus is the Living Word. He is presented to the New Testament church in the Scriptures and the visible Word of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And I think of these words from the Book of Hebrews, "Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:28, 29)." Reverence is defined as "profound respect". Awe is defined as "wonder" or "amazement". As God said, "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word (Is. 66:2b)." And these words stand before us: "My flesh trembles for fear of you, and I am afraid of your judgments (Ps. 119:120)."

I cannot cite the author, but I pray we take these words to heart:

When men and women come into God's presence, they know it. Moses takes off his shoes (Ex. 3), Israel is struck with fear (Ex. 20), Isaiah quakes (Isa. 6), Job silences his lips (Job 40), John falls down as though dead (Rev. 1). Even the elders and angels, who are worshiping day in and day out before the throne, aren't casual in their worship (Isa. 6; Rev. 4). Casual worship of the living, true, holy, sovereign God of the universe just doesn't exist ("casual worship" is not about clothing, it's about a nonchalant attitude toward worship). There is a seriousness that must mark it, a solemnity and honor that must attend it, a gravity that must saturate it.

Lessons At The Temple are about the incomprehensible love of God in Christ and His presence in Word and Sacraments that bring us face to face with the promise: "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (I Jn. 1:7b)." The cross was no laughing matter for Jesus!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott