

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The third Sunday of Lent: March 3, 2024

The Temple

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Good morning and welcome to the third Sunday in Lent. What a scene we have presented in the Temple with Jesus clearing the floor, so to speak! There are so many levels to this story.

The first thing to notice is that Jesus is clearing the Temple of what was considered ordinary business as usual. In fact, part of the Temple's financial survival depended on the transactions taking place. In modern terms, they were selling salvation.

We should also note that Jesus isn't really losing his temper as much as he is protesting the actions taking place. This story is to give some background on why the Temple priests of his own heritage would condemn him. It is very possible, according to some historians, that the clearing of the Temple was a planned, staged, outright political yet spiritual consideration.

Jesus goes into the Temple to clear out the corruption that had developed over the decades before. This action is recorded at two different times in the gospels. John talks about it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry whereas the other gospels put it at the end. We often want to harmonize events because the idea of it happening twice may feel uncomfortable to us. But Jesus doing this both at the beginning and at the end of his ministry is fitting and would have happened three years apart. This indicates that little had changed in the Temple practices between him overturning the tables the first and second time.

Just earlier in the scripture Jesus is beginning to reveal his identity with the miracle at the wedding at Cana turning water into wine. Jesus is now becoming a real problem to the authorities who, I would assume, enjoyed their comfortable lives. We know the tension from the priests and scribes will continue right up until the final judgment to crucify Jesus.

But we know this: this is the story of our faith. Yet we are called to ask, what does that mean for us today? Well, if you are worried about potlucks, bingo, or raffle tickets for the church you can take a sigh of relief. This is not about that. This is about where God really resides; what is really required to worship; who and what is included. And that is, as we know, the ditch in which Jesus will actually die.

Jesus is clearing the Temple because he is telling them that you cannot sell salvation. God doesn't exist only at the edge of the altar while an animal is sacrificed in penance for a person, family or community. Jesus wants the focus to be on God, and this leads us back to those ten commandments.

What was happening outside of the very area that was meant to be sacred, was that these people were worshiping monies, taking advantage of those who were less than in some way, promoting coveting from marketplace competition, false witness, stealing, all those things God desires we not do for the good of the community.

Well, today we are in a church, and yes we have small fundraisers. But we would never deny a person coming into our worship space to seek a relationship with God. However, there is one step deeper, begging the question, is your life (i.e., the Temple God gave you) clear of promoting coveting? Is there any lying or avoidance in your relationships? False witness? What do we need to clear out of

our lives so we can focus more on God and not material success. How can we train ourselves that our God given Temple-body needs care?

This leads me to the second theme that comes up and that is Jesus' body as Temple of God. We know that now the disciples are beginning to figure out something is up with Jesus. Jesus has now become a threat to the Temple elite. But he is also sharing that his body, his Temple, will be destroyed and built back up.

Now we here today, at this very moment longing for the resurrection at Easter, totally comprehend and understand what Jesus is saying. To those present he is explaining that God resides not in some Temple as they had been taught for generations, but inside us, outside us, around us, we are not separate from God. We are the ones who are just not always tuned in.

This temple, Jesus says, will be destroyed and raised from the dead. He is the place where heaven and earth meet and even though the disciples did not grasp what he said in that moment, they would look back and connect the dots of what he said to what would happen on the cross and the empty tomb.

Close your eyes and picture someone you love dearly. Remember a memory. Feel the love. Breathe it in – God is there. Stay there for a moment, sit in that love. That is not just happening because you are in a building that has been blessed, it is because that is how intimate our relationship with God is. Take a breath and come back.

We wonder about the mystery of God; we wonder about the mystery of Communion. But the grain of the earth, out from the same dust we are made of, the same human dust of Jesus, we through our love, create a space for God both

within us, and outside of us in a tangible way. Anytime we commune with each other, we commune with God.

Lent is a time to clear your Temple, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts and minds, so we can more closely walk with God. So those commandments become not commandments in fear but commitments of love.

As I have asked every Sunday during the Lent, the questions to ponder this week. What would my life be like if I could feel God in the breath I take during prayer? What if I cleaned out my life of things that keep me from being closer to God and those I love? What if I tended to the Temple of my body just a little bit better with God's help?

We continue to ponder and wander on our Lenten journey. Amen