

Sermon John 2 13 22 3rd Sunday in Lent Series B

Sermon: 3rd Sunday in Lent

Text: John 2:13-22 – Jesus clears the temple

Theme: The temple of the LORD

Goal: God requires true worship through Jesus Christ

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Did you ever see Jesus angry like in this text? The image we have of Jesus is always a mild and humble one, a patient man, who accepts the sinners and loves the children. But sometimes He became angry. This is His “holy wrath”.

To understand this episode in Jesus' life a little bit more, we have to learn about the kind of worship that people were used to at that time, and why the animal sellers and the money changers were in the temple:

The Concordia Self Study Bible and the Africa Bible Commentary explain it: “*Cattle, sheep and doves were required for sacrifices (according to the Old Testament rules of Services). Jews who came great distances (couldn't bring animals with them and) had to be able to buy sacrificial animals near the temple. The merchants, however, were selling them in the outer court of the temple itself, the one place where Gentiles could come to pray.*” (CSSB). The non-Jews who believed in the God of Israel and who came to worship in Jerusalem were hindered in their prayers by all the commerce's noise. Plus: “*These animals cost five or six times more than animals bought elsewhere. Rather than providing a helpful service to worshippers, the authorities were exploiting the worshippers. Making money, and not the worship of God, had become the focus of the leadership.*” (ABC p. 1257). Also: The Roman coins had stamped the image of the Emperor. This was considered idolatry. “*The coins had to be changed into currency acceptable to the temple authorities, which made money changers necessary. They should not, however, have been working in the temple itself.*” (CSSB) “*And they charged heavily for changing money!*” (ABC).

I think this helps to understand better Jesus' reaction when He saw those people trading in the temple's court.

I – The zeal for the Father's house

The disciples interpreted Jesus' reaction according to Psalm 69:9, where it's written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." This takes us back to the Old Testament reading for today: The Ten Commandments. God introduces Himself from three different angles in the first three Commandments: A) In the first Commandment as a "jealous God", who doesn't admit of any rivalry: "You shall have no other gods before me"; B) – in the second Commandment as "the LORD (who) will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name"; - C) and in the third one He introduces Himself as God who asks to "keep holy" His day, and this includes everything related to the place of worship and to His Word as well.

Jesus said to those whom He drove from the temple area: "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" - This is the second time that Jesus called the temple as His "Father's house". The first one was when He stayed in the temple when He was 12 years old, and He answered to His parents: "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). And in Mark 11:17 Jesus quoted Jeremiah 7:11 and said: "It is written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." The temple is a sign of the living presence of God among His people, and a place where others can come to hear about the true God and to worship Him. In spite of the misuse by the Jews (because they were not using the temple in a right way), Jesus worshiped there and recognized that it was His Father's house.

God is not only a God of love, but He is also zealous for His Law. We cannot misuse His name and His house. Worshipping is not just a matter of external rituals, but of internal conviction and belief. But, on the other hand, it is also a matter of external rite: We have a place of worship, we come together, we sing, we pray, we have fellowship... We have to respect God's house and we have to keep it holy.

II – The temple of His body

Jesus was challenged by the Jews why he was doing what He did: “What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?” The traders in the temple were doing their business under the protection of the leadership's authority. The religious leaders were gaining profits from those tradings. But, what about the authority of Jesus?

People who complained of Jesus' attitude didn't believe that He was the Son of God and that the temple was “His Father's house”. Jesus gave a prophetic answer, which nobody was able to understand until He rose again from the dead. “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”

Jesus was not talking about the huge building and the stones, “but the temple He had spoken of was His body”, the true temple of the living God. This was the real sign of His authority: They could destroy the temple of His body and Jesus would restore it again in the resurrection of the body. John wrote (1:18): “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known.”

These words of Jesus were used against Him at His trial as an accusation to condemn Him: “This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days’” (Matt 26:60-61). Even mockers repeated the charge as He hung on the cross: “You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself. Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God” (Matt 27:40).

But what was a matter of mockery for the unbelievers, God turned into a matter of faith and a sign to the believers. “After Jesus was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.” The resurrection was the biggest sign among all other signs and miracles that Jesus performed. As He Himself affirmed: “A wicked and

adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:39-40). - His resurrection is the only sign that endures forever and that works like a “golden key” for all what Jesus taught and did.

Conclusion: The Apostle Paul asks: “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

What “animals”, profits and false concepts Jesus has to clear from our heart? Look: This matter is related to the 1st Commandment. What has the first place in our heart? Is it the love for our God Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Or do we have other priorities in our heart, in our “temple of the Spirit”? Jesus is still ready to clear our heart, not with a whip of cords any more, but with His forgiveness if we are repented and rely on Him only. Let us allow Him to clear our heart, without complaining. He wants to have us as His temple only, and our heart as a “house of prayer”. The Lord's Supper is the big opportunity to receive Jesus, His body and blood, into our hearts. He comes and clears us.- Thanks, my God, for abiding in me. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
Cape Town, 11 March 2012