

Sermon 10th Sunday after Trinity

Text: Luke 19:41-48 v46 Jesus said “It is written ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’ Every day he was teaching at the temple... because all the people hung on his words’

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen

Dear friends in Jesus Christ

We are gathered here today to hear God’s word, to spend time in God’s house, to be with God, to talk to God and with God, to receive His grace. We do so in safety and in comfort. We may even consider this to be normal and expected. In our text, it certainly was not the case when Jesus went to the High Temple in Jerusalem. 500 years ago, it certainly was not normal when Martin Luther went to church either. Today I want to think about “God’s House – a place of prayer”.

1. In Jesus’ Time

It was Jewish law and custom to buy and offer sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. It was the only place that Jews were allowed to offer sacrifices. A tax was charged by the chief priests, who controlled what was done. That in itself was not the problem. But, the tax became an important source of income for the priests. Greed and corruption occurred. The priests were more interested in the income from the sale of the offerings than in the word of the Lord that was preached in the temple. It is no wonder that Jesus was upset when he came to this Holy Temple, His Father’s house, and realised that the primary purpose was trading and making money.

We also need to consider. Most of the preaching and teaching of Jesus took place in villages, houses, fields, etc. We read that Jesus only went to the temple as a 12 year old boy (2:27), for the last temptation by the devil (4v9), and now shortly before his death. It was the holiest site for the Jews, and in our text, Jesus came here to preach. We can appreciate that coming to the house of the Lord is a deeply significant event, then and now.

2. In Martin Luther's Time

If we now consider the situation about 500 years ago. There were many beautiful churches with services almost every day. However, most people were only able to stand somewhere in the back of the church, and they did not understand a word as the services were held in Latin. But, what everyone understood very clearly was the payment of indulgences. To quote Luther's sermon on the same text " *They (Jewish chief priests) did just as our priests and monks do now, who have also made dens of robbers of our churches and cloisters, and have preached poison, and held masses only that the people might give them money and presents for holding them that they might thus fill their stomachs. They made the church a market house, in which they carried on their idle talk, corrupted and destroyed the sheep of God's pastures by their scandalous false doctrine, that it may well be called a robber's den for the soul.*" Strong words from Martin Luther. A big part of the reformation was ensuring that the house of the Lord should be a house of prayer again.

3. Today at St Thomas

Our service is focussed on our God and savior, Jesus Christ. We start our service in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We acknowledge our sinful nature in confession and absolution. We read the Psalm, Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel. We pray the creed, church prayer and Lord's prayer. We learn about the word of God in the sermon. Normally we conduct a special order culminating in the distribution of the true body and blood of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. We end with the Lord's blessing. This and more is all done to celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord for the sake of our salvation through faith alone. I think that this is what makes our Sunday Service so special and meaningful.

Money plays a small part of our service, when we collect offerings, each according to their conscience. As the treasurer of our congregation, I worry a bit too much about our "income" and "expenses". It is necessary and good to have order in these matters, but they should not take centre stage. At council meeting, AGM's and other church matters, we spend time talking about money and the impact of money on the future of our congregation, too much I think. So, there is room for us to contemplate and consider – what can we do so that our church is focussed more as a "house of prayer". For

instance - Does everyone give 10% of their income to God every month? Maybe then the only discussion related to money would be how best to help others more.

4. House of Prayer

In v45, Jesus “began to **drive out** those who were selling”. In Mathew 21 we read “Jesus upset the tables and seats”. We can say that Jesus was **assertive** in his dealings. This is very unusual for Him, and is a clear indication how special and Holy the temple was. To quote Martin Luther again “Therefore, as merciful and compassionate as he (Jesus) showed himself to be to the poor multitude of people who are so wretchedly misled to their destruction; so great was the anger he showed against those who are the cause of this destruction. Otherwise he did not often resort to physical force and cause an uproar, as he does here, so that it is a strange act for an excellent and kind man, so full of love.” Let us never forget or take for granted the privilege we have in coming to the House of the Lord, every Sunday.

For instance, should we not “be quiet” for 5 minutes before the start of our divine service at 9:30 as a time to prepare ourselves to be in the house of prayer with our Lord.

To quote a commentary: “For Luther, prayer is bound to meditation on the Lord's Word. Studying and meditating on the Scriptures turns into prayer, and prayer likewise leads us back to the Scriptures where the Lord refreshes us with His gifts of life, salvation and the forgiveness of all our sins.”¹

5. Conclusion

Let us praise and glorify our Lord and God when we enter His House, St Thomas. Let this be a house of prayer, confession, absolution, worship, praise, fellowship, communion and grace.

Let us focus on Him, and only Him, and hang onto His word, as they did 2000 years ago in Jerusalem when Jesus taught in the temple.

Let our church, St Thomas, be our refuge in this busy world where we come every Sunday to find peace, strength and love in our Lord in His house, a house of prayer.

And with this love and new life let us go out into the world every Sunday to love others, as Jesus loves us.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen

(Written by Axel Pape; revised by Pr. Walter)

¹ Pastor Wolfmueller, Hope Lutheran Church, Aurora, 2006