

Sermon for March 11, 2012 – Lent 3

John 2:13-22

Theme: Jesus Restores God's Temple

- 1) *He restores the way of worship.*
- 2) *He restores the center of worship.*

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

It is almost that time of year again. The weather is a "little" warmer. The snow is gone. The days are getting longer. It's almost spring, and you know what comes with spring, don't you? Spring cleaning.

In our text for today, we see Jesus doing some spring-cleaning in his Father's house. Time had damaged worship in the temple of Jerusalem. The spiritual condition of the Jews was in shambles. So let us watch **Jesus Restore God's Temple**.
1) *He restores both the way of worship, and also 2) the center of worship.*

Part One: Restoring the Way of Worship

Our text takes place at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was in Jerusalem with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. It is worth noting the time of year our text takes place, because it would be during the Passover Feast, a few years later, that Jesus would once again clean the temple^a and accomplish everything he prophesied concerning his death and resurrection.

The temple was the LORD's house - the place where God wanted the people to confess their sins to Him and receive forgiveness. It was supposed to be a symbol of God's love and presence with His people. The worship and sacrifices at the temple were all a foreshadowing of the coming sacrifice that Jesus would make for our sins.

But when Jesus entered the outer temple court, he became enraged with what he saw. His Father's house was overrun with cattle, sheep, doves, and money changers. People were bartering for the best price, so they wouldn't have to pay too much for their offerings to the LORD. Sellers were trying to make profits. Look at what the temple had become: a market where money ruled – where purchasing and selling were more important than meditation and devotion.

"But," the Jews might have asked, "what was wrong with having a market in the temple? Wouldn't it be convenient to simply buy an animal right there, instead of hauling one through the streets of Jerusalem?" Convenient: yes. But here's the thing: God wanted people to bring *their own* sheep, cattle, and doves as offerings – not buy them in the temple. If the people couldn't bring their own animals, then God's law allowed them to sell the animals they earmarked for sacrifice and use that money to buy an animal closer to the temple;^b but that did not mean that people could set up a market in the temple itself! This was worse than putting an ATM machine in the narthex of a church! It misses the whole point of what an offering is. What's in the heart of the giver is far more important to the LORD than the offering a person places on the altar. King David explains it this way: ¹⁶ *You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.* ¹⁷ *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.*^c You see, God wants the hearts of His people to love and trust in Him. He wanted their offerings to reflect that love and trust and be carefully chosen by them in advance.

What did Jesus do when he saw what had become of the temple? *He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.* ¹⁶ *To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"*

What would Jesus think if He came into our house of worship in Kewaunee? Would he have to do any cleaning? Now, we don't have an open market or ATMs in the narthex of the church. There is no bartering to get the best deal for an offering; but it is still all too easy to worship like the Israelites, and turn our church into a place of meaningless sacrifice. For example, how often haven't we just given whatever bill we grab from our wallets at the time the offering plate is passed, instead of seriously thinking about our offering as a reflection of our trust in the LORD? How often haven't we thought of our offerings merely as "church dues" instead of a heartfelt "thank you" to God? How often haven't we recited the confession or the Lord's Prayer without really thinking about the words we are saying? Are these the sacrifices and worship God wants? No. God is not interested in what is in the collection plate, or what words come from our lips but in what is in our hearts. Our offerings are not what move God to love us, but his great love for us moves our hearts to offer ourselves to him, as he offered himself for us. The worship God desires is our heartfelt love and trust in him which will express itself in our words and actions.

Mothers, which kind of gift would you want to receive from your children: an pricey gift that was thoughtlessly purchased, or something your children made for you, that took them a lot of effort and time? Wives, what kind of anniversary gift would you like from your husband: a visa gift card that took him a whole two seconds to get; or an evening, where your husband attempts to surprise you by cleaning the house while you are away and preparing a nice romantic dinner (even though the food might be a little burnt)? If the saying is true that the thought behind the gift is more important than the gift itself, how, then, do our gifts appear before God, who knows how much thought we put into them?

God wants our hearts, not our money. He wants our offerings of money to come from the heart, not from convenience. He wants our time with him at church to be one of wanting to be with him, not because we have to. He wants us to help the church with our talents because we love him, not because no one else will do it. This is what God desires from us. This is true worship: to serve God out of love.

These truths make me want pray: "Lord Jesus, please come into my heart and clean it. Cast out from this temple of yours all my selfish thoughts of convenience and laziness. Please, let my heart be a place of true worship, where you are the center."

And Jesus will do what we ask for in this prayer, for He always is ready to clean and restore His temple. We saw how he called for the restoration of the way we worship, now let us look at how he restored the center of our worship.

Part Two: Restoring the center of worship.

When Jesus turned over the tables and cleansed the temple, many were in shock. They asked him for a sign to prove that He had the right to do this. Well, Jesus was the Messiah – the very person this temple pointed to. His whole ministry was a sign, as he fulfilled every prophecy written about the Messiah. John the Baptist told everyone that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. The entire Bible pointed to Jesus as the Savior.

But Jesus answered their request in this way: *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."* The Pharisees were confused, thinking that Jesus was talking about Herod's temple, which had taken 46 years to restore. But Jesus was actually talking about himself.

To understand the beauty of Jesus' answer, let us consider a few facts. First of all, what is the temple? God calls the temple the place where he dwells.^d The temple in Jerusalem, of course, was just a picture of where God himself dwells.^e It was a picture of Jesus, in whom *all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.*^f

The temple was to comfort God's people with the knowledge of his presence among them. This was again a picture of Jesus, whose name is Emmanuel: God with us.^g The sacrifices at the temple were a picture of the once-and-for-all sacrifice Jesus would make in his body.^h The temple was the place where people could come before God in repentance and receive His love and forgiveness. This again is a picture of Christ Jesus, in whom Man and God come together, and in whom we find forgiveness of our sins, peace and mercy from God. Jesus is the true temple of God, the one that every aspect of temple worship in Jerusalem pointed to.

God never intended Solomon's temple, let alone Herod's, to be the center, or object of Jewish worship. The temple pointed to the Messiah. He was to be the focus and center of everybody's worship. In our text Jesus, the Messiah, stood in the temple of Jerusalem, and called attention to himself who is the true temple and center of all worship. His death and resurrection would bring true peace, forgiveness and fellowship with God to all who would look to Him in faith.

Like the Jews we are tempted to forget what God intends the center of our worship to be. We have such a loving congregation for which we can praise God. At the same time we have to be aware not to make our congregation itself, the center of our worship. The center of our worship has always been, and will always be, Christ Jesus himself.

Let me explain what I mean in a little bit of a different way: At church we all experience numerous blessings like: fellowship with good friends, singing, potlucks and maybe even an interesting sermon. But these should never be the reasons we come to church. The reason we come to church should always be Christ Jesus himself; the opportunity to hear of his love and forgiveness, to be strengthened by him, and to strengthen others with His message. Jesus promises to do these things for us only through the Word and Sacraments, which He has given to the Church, which Jesus also calls His temple.ⁱ When we hear the Word and partake of the sacraments, Jesus promises to send His Holy Spirit to dwell within and among us. We ourselves become His house – the place where His glory dwells.

Jesus restored God's Temple. He restored the way we are to worship God, namely with our whole hearts. He also restored the center and focus of our worship which is He himself. His death and resurrection won our salvation. It is in Him and through Him alone that we find forgiveness of sins and access to God^j. Amen.

References

^a Cf. Matthew 21:12ff, Mark 11:15ff, Luke 19 45ff

^b Cf. Deuteronomy 14:24-26

^c Psalm 51:16-17

^d Cf. Exodus 25:8

^e Cf. 1 Kings 8

^f Colossians 2:9

^g Cf. Matthew 1:23

^h Cf. Hebrews 10

ⁱ Cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16

^j Ephesians 2:18