

**March 4, 2018**

**Lent 3**

**GOSPEL**

*John 2:13–22*

*Jesus attacks the commercialization of religion by driving merchants out of the temple. When challenged, he responds mysteriously, with the first prediction of his own death and resurrection. In the midst of a seemingly stable religious center, Jesus suggests that the center itself has changed.*

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After 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.

So, today's Gospel lesson, ... Jesus is a little bit upset. What Jesus did was not a minor thing here, this potentially could have shut down the business of the day for quite awhile during and the very busy time of Passover, when the city's population exploded with faithful Jews making this important annual trek to make their proper sacrifice to God. Upsetting the temple would perhaps be equivalent to a store's computers going down on Black Friday; it was a big deal. Some surmise that the only reason Jesus wasn't arrested right then and there, was that this was timed with an insurrection that was occurring in another part of the city at that very time. Some even attempt to tie that insurrection to Barabbas.

This is a Gospel a text that goes in many directions. Some will correctly point out that today's text also is another reminder about the whole three-day thing and Jesus predicting his death and resurrection, which certainly is applicable in this season of Lent. Others will talk about the point Jesus was trying to make in turning over tables and making a whip of cords. Over the course of history people have taken this story and used it to rail against gambling; whether or not there can be bingo in a church building, and what is the role of any business transaction in the church, as well as many other issues concerning consumer ventures in the church. Some enter into the debate as to what Jesus was upset about – was he upset about that the temple was simply becoming a marketplace, or was he upset, as it says and other Gospel texts, that it was being turned into a den of thieves. There can be a difference, and depending on which Gospel you go with, it can take you to differing conclusions – like – Jesus was upset because the temple had become a marketplace with the businesses of changing money and buying animals sacrifices and that no businesses should exist on the grounds of the temple; therefore, not the

church either. Still others conclude that Jesus was not upset with changing money and buying the sacrifices, as this was necessary for all the out of area travelers, but he was upset that people were being taken advantage of, cheated, and monopolized by unethical practices by unethical business people; and still others say it was not really either - primarily, it is that Jesus just wanted to demonstrate that God did not desire burnt offerings or sacrifices anymore, but wanted people to show mercy.

However, what seems beyond a doubt here, is that Jesus acts in an emotional way. This text has often been referred to as the “angry Jesus text”. It is an example of the emotional ranges that Jesus experienced that is written down. It certainly is the most concise and popular example of Jesus losing his temper. Now even when one says, “lose one’s temper”; there are some who say the Son of God would never lose his temper. When one comes at it from this angle, one wrestles with the human element of Jesus and the divine nature of Christ. It is a mysterious and perplexing dilemma to be sure. However, I think if we ignore that Jesus is angry here, perhaps we are shaving off the rough for edges of Jesus, that we simply do not understand. Even as I looked for pictures for the PowerPoint slides for this sermon, often the pictures of Jesus cleansing the temple are often softened. As you see, some of them show Jesus with the whip in his hands, but his face looks pretty pleasant and that halo on some stands strong. Not that type of image that would show up on a camera when some of us have that much “zeal” going on inside of us. This is a reflection of a certain approach to Jesus that is demonstrated in this art. In another picture you can see here an angrier Jesus, this may make us a little bit more uncomfortable. Even in the midst of the episode, the disciples are pondering what this means and then they remembered we are told that

it was written “zeal for your house will consume me.” They too were trying to make sense of the behavior of Jesus.

We quickly get edgy when we hear or see others depict a Jesus that is outside our contained thinking of him. Even on the other side of the spectrum, a laughing Jesus can make some uncomfortable. In my office, sitting on my desk is a picture of a laughing Jesus that a parishioner gave me years ago when we did a study on the humanity of Jesus. I like it, but I’ve often thought that I need a picture of the angry Jesus in the temple as well. However, that is not easy to find. I have yet to be in someone’s house or a church building that have a picture of Jesus in their living room and it was a picture of Jesus knocking over tables. I have yet to see a portrait of Jesus in a church with a whip of cords in his hand. But maybe we do need more images of the upset and laughing Jesus in our visions; because I think both of these images remind us of the humanity of God, of our Creator becoming flesh and dwelling among us. We know of course, in another text from scripture that Jesus wept, but that doesn’t seem to push boundaries as much; but a laughing Jesus or an angry Jesus - this sometimes does. Personally, I think this allows a peek into how incarnate God came among us. If God became human to be one of us, then I believe Jesus was one of us, he was not shielded from the full human experience. I believe he got mad, sad and glad – maybe he even joked around a bit.

So, when was the last time you lost your temper? What would a painting of that look like – would there be lots of the color red? I am glad that there are not inside the vehicle recordings of me driving a car – it’s not pretty sometimes when I am on the road. Anger often catches us at our worse – even when its righteous anger, meaning I am justified for my initial reaction, because what is happening is not right, it is not fair, it is blatantly

wrong. However, even when being upset is a proper reaction, how we carry ourselves in those moments matter. Anger is often the surface emotion of another deeper emotion as well. Sometimes we respond in fits of anger because what is really happening inside of us is that we have been hurt, we have been disappointed, we have been demoralized; we are depressed. Unfortunately, as we have all experienced at one time or another is that when we feel these emotions, we mask them over with anger. And all too often that anger is channeled into the wrong place. Often on our loved ones, our pets, our co-workers, neighbors and the poor customer service representative who has no control over the situation.

What about your faith life makes you mad? Sometimes things happen in our lives that make us mad at God. Sometimes things happen in our daily sojourn that allows “zeal” for one’s house to consume us. Part of the journey of the Lenten season reminds of our humanity, that we are dust and to dust we shall return, that at times we replace our God center with other things, that at times we are a broken people. Lent reminds us of our need for reflection, repentance, and renewal. However, with the events of Holy Week, with the death of Jesus on the cross, with the news of the empty tomb, we are also reminded of what is put to death with Jesus, and what can rise to new life. Thank God for a God that does not hold on to our brokenness; thank God for a loving Creator that accepts the entire range of our human emotions and frailties. Thank God for a God that hears and understands our greatest cries of anger, rage, and hurt. Thank God for a God, that loves a wretch like me, with that amazing grace. Amen.