

Sermon Notes - March 7, 2021

"A Time for Anger and Action"

(John 2:13-22)

When I was in college at Campbell University, we had a professor, who worked in the religion department, who was fired or let go. The college had an unwritten rule that all professors in the religion department had to be Baptist. Sometime during his tenure there (and he had tenure), he went to work for a Methodist Church as the Choir Director on the weekends and Wednesday nights. He taught at the college during the day and Wednesday nights and Sundays, he was at the Methodist Church. As time went on and he served that church, he joined it and became a member of the Methodist denomination. The Baptists fired him (or let him go) because it was an unwritten rule that he had to be a Baptist as long as he taught in the religion department at Campbell University. Many of the students, including myself, got very upset because this was an outstanding professor - well-liked by the students and a good teacher. So, we got angry and we protested; we wrote letters to the College President and the Board of Trustees. Believe it or not, the College President called in some of us to meet with him - and I was one of those students. I was the yearbook editor. He called some of us into his office to talk to us about our letters to him. He tried to explain that it was just because it was a rule that all the professors in the religion department had to be Baptist. We still didn't quite get it, since it was an unwritten rule, but that's what the Board of Trustees decided. We had gotten angry and took action. We wrote letters to the college newspaper, to the President, and to the Board of Trustees. It never got resolved the way we hoped because he was still let go, but we tried to do something.

Today's story is about Jesus getting angry. It's one of the few stories in the Bible where we see Jesus get angry. Now there was one time that Jesus got upset with his disciples because they were pushing away the mothers and children. The mothers wanted to bring their babies for Jesus to bless them and the disciples were pushing them away. (In their society, women and children had no status, so the disciples were pushing the women and children away.) The scriptures said that Jesus got

indignant with them; he was really upset with them. He said, “Forbid not the little children to come unto me because such is the kingdom of God.” Jesus also had another time that he got angry and that was when he was worshipping with the disciples on the Sabbath. There was a man who had a withered hand there, and Jesus decided to heal him. It was on the Sabbath, and the Jews believed that you didn’t do any kind of work (like healing or anything) on the Sabbath. Jesus healed this man and the religious leaders got upset with him, but Jesus also got upset with them.

Today, we see where Jesus seems like he’s really upset – and he had reason to be. ***There’s a time to get angry and take action.*** We often get angry over petty things like somebody cut us off in traffic, or the fast food line is not fast, or we get impatient with the doctor’s office, or whatever. We have a lot of things that we get upset with – some good and some not so good. But there’s a time to get angry and take action – and that’s what Jesus did.

Now I want to frame the setting for you of what’s going on in this story: The Jews from all over the world were coming to Jerusalem to the Temple for Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. At Passover, the Jews were celebrating God’s deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Once a year they would make this journey to Jerusalem; for some of them it only took a day or two and others took 3 to 7 days to get there. They were supposed to bring animals to sacrifice. Now, what your sacrifice was depended on who you were, where you were from, how old you were, and what kind of sins you had committed, and the priest would decide what your sacrifice was to be for your forgiveness. For some of them, it may have been a ½ bushel of wheat and a pigeon or a dove. For others, it would be a full cow or an ox that you had to sacrifice. For people traveling, this would be difficult -- to take your animals, extra food for three to seven days and to keep that animal clean and without blemish. The temple sacrifice had to be perfect – unblemished, clean, fatted, healthy-looking. Therefore, they would buy these sacrifices at the Temple when they got there. Now here’s all these Jews coming in from around the world. They’ve got to have food and lodging, money for sacrifices, money to pay a Temple-tax to get into the courtyard, money to

pay a tax to the priest, the vendor for the sacrifices, and the money changers (changing the Roman coins into Jewish-acceptable coinage.) Can you believe that they couldn't touch the animal once they had bought it? They would have to pay someone to take the animal from the merchant to the priest because touching this animal made them unclean for Temple worship. They had all this going on - ALL these animals - in the court of the Gentiles, in the temple courtyard.

The Sadducees, who were the overseers of the Temple, decided that it was okay to take away the place of worship for the Gentiles - the Court of Gentiles and the temple courtyard, and to put all these animals, business transactions, and money changers tables in what was normally a place of worship for non-Jews. Jesus got angry at them. Can't you imagine this circus-like environment or flea-market environment with all the sights, sounds, and smells of the animals and the crowds? They are in the place where the Gentiles worshipped, and Jesus got upset. It was as though the Jews had completely forgotten their mission. When God called Abraham, he said, "I'll make you a great nation and you are to be a light to all the nations of the earth." *So the Jews forgot they were to be a light to the nations, including the Gentiles (the non-Jews). They forgot that the Gentiles were the people of God as well as the Jews - that God valued them and loved them just as much as the Jews. They were valued to God. Jesus got upset because the Jews were de-valuing the Gentiles. They were defrauding the Gentiles of a place of worship in the Temple. They were defrauding Jesus, God, and the Temple. Jesus got angry and he took action.*

You would never believe that Jesus got that angry, right? Some said that he took a whip or a rope. In those days, they didn't take sticks, batons, or things like that in the Temple, so it was probably some palm branches that were put together, and Jesus used it like a whip to scare the animals away and the people out. It said he overturned the tables so the money-changers' coins fell on the pavement and rolled down the steps. Can't you imagine the noise? And here's all the Romans, the Sadducees, and the priests watching what's happening, like "What is this man doing?"

I want to tell you that I think this story says several things to us: ***Number one, it's okay to get angry sometimes at the right things and take action.*** When we see a child being abused or neglected -- an animal being abused -- when we go to the nursing home and find out an elderly person is being neglected and abused -- we need to stand up for them. When we see a kid mistreated and bullied at school, I hope that God will give us the courage to stand up for them. When we see somebody discriminated against at work -- if we feel there are people at the church who feel like they're left out and not valued, I hope that we'll stand up for them. ***Melvin Wheatley said, "There are situations in life in which the absence of anger is the essence of evil."*** There are some times that we should get mad and do something. Jesus got angry because they were violating God and a group of people, saying, "You're not valuable. You're not worthy. You're not valuable in God's eyes." But, Jesus wanted the Gentiles to know that they, too, are God's children, and they are to be valued and welcomed in worship. There is a time to get angry.

I heard an interesting comment about anger, and it said that anger is like an engine light flashing -- it's a beacon signaling that something needs care and attention. And then I read something that Will Rogers said, "Those who fly into rage always make a bad landing." But, the one I want to remember is this one: "Remember that the end never justifies the meanness." Did you hear that? Meanness. The end never justifies the meanness.

Maybe our greatest sin sometimes is not getting angry at the right time, at the right thing, and doing something. Jesus got angry and he took action.

I want to say that the greater point that I think Jesus was trying to make in this story is that we, as a church, are to value and welcome all people -- no matter their age, their gender, their race, their nationality, their social-economic level. Whoever they are, we are to value and welcome all people as God's children.

I want to ask us a question to think about – are there people who ever feel pushed out of the church? Are there people who ever feel like they don't belong? Maybe they don't do things the way we do and they feel pushed out and not included or valued -- that they can't serve; that they don't belong because they didn't do it the way we wanted them to do it or they don't think we accept them. **God wants all people to feel they're valued, and most especially by the church – the body of Christ.** And that's who we are. So, today you have a short sermon. There's a time to get angry and there's a time to take action. But more than that – will we be a church that always welcomes and values all people, and makes them feel welcomed and that they belong, and they can serve and they can give here?

When I was a kid in a little Baptist Church in the country, we Baptists always thought that we were better than the Methodists and Presbyterians. Well, the Lutherans thought they were better than the Baptists – and the Catholics thought they were better than all of them. Well guess what? ... That's changed a little bit over the years. Now it seems to be that it's the new church starts versus the old denominational churches. It's not a denomination we worship, but God! We just choose different ways (different churches) of worshipping God. But you know what, we all decide to go to a church where we feel comfortable – where we can belong and fit in and feel accepted and valued where we can grow and we can serve together. I pray that God will help us to always be that kind of a church. Amen.