



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

When I was young my mom had a ritual of doing spring house cleaning every year. She was a stay at home mom and actually she took great joy in keeping a super clean house. The tradition did not wear off on me the way I suppose she would have wanted, but when my kids were young I did try to do a very thorough cleaning after winter, at least in their rooms. You all know the drill: move all the furniture, wash baseboards, clean out the webs from the top of the closets, wipe down the furniture, etc.

However, as my children got older, I would tell my friends in the spring that I was a little behind, doing the spring cleaning of 1998 in 2004. Just a bit behind, but still working at it, still saw some importance in keeping things clean.

Well, when I re-read the Gospel lesson for today, I thought of Jesus' actions as doing a sort of spring cleaning to the temple. Jesus was trying to purge the house of God, of its corruption and disorder. He wanted his Father's house to be free of secular trappings, so as to keep them away from worship. He wanted the temple to be pure and holy once more. So what does this story do for us today?

Well our text starts with Passover and that is one of the holiest feasts of the Jewish faith. It reminds us of the night that God liberated the Israelite slaves from Egyptian rule. Through the streets the angel of death came to all homes where the blood of the lamb was not on the lintel, to take the life of every first-born male. Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan, which was in the

spring of the year. And so it was with this year, that Jesus attended the Passover celebration, along with probably 100,000 faithful followers.

Even that is remarkable in itself. People came from all over the middle east as pilgrims on a journey. So logistically there were a lot of mouths to feed, many tired exhausted travelers to put up. All these people were in Jerusalem to make a sacrifice at the temple, and as was also their custom, to pay their temple tax. Probably even a bigger event than going to a Super Bowl game today. Just imagine the city with the bustling crowds having full restaurants, motels and then the shopping for trinkets to remember the trip.

So at the Passover time, I think it was true that the merchants were making a killing off the Passover. It had to be a super event that they would take advantage of. In the synoptic gospels the vendors are accused of cheating the people. Matthew calls it a “den of robbers” because the merchants knew that the people had to purchase animals for sacrifice and they had to exchange their coins for the ones that would be acceptable to pay the temple tax. Rather like the motels around Lambeau Field raising their prices on Packer’s home game day!

So perhaps there was some price gouging going on, but I don’t think that this is the focus of Jesus’ anger. John portrays the scene showing that Jesus was angry that these vendors and all the buying and selling had intruded on the sacred space for worship. Verse 16 has Jesus telling the merchants, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” It is easy to see how this happened. It is supply and demand and probably started with one vendor setting up in the corner of the space and then others followed. Reminded me of the situation we had this summer at the Farmer’s Market when we had so many vendors that a few started setting up in the middle row of the parking lot and congested traffic. That made for a dangerous place instead of the wonderful opportunity it was to be for the residents who attended.

Well, the temple was overrun by merchants and Jesus wanted it stopped. And so we read how upset He must have been to be overturning the tables and making a whip to get the stinky animals out of God’s house. The temple that day had become a marketplace, a bazaar. It had lost its sacred character.

Even though there were lots of people there, the temple had lost its spirituality and reverence.

I remember at St Olaf, there was a carved wooden sign above the door, that I read every time I entered the sanctuary. It said, "Let us enter God's house reverently." A great reminder of why we gather. And it was no different in Jerusalem that day. All should have come to the temple out of reverence for their Lord God. It was a time to pay respect with a temple tax and a sacrifice to God.

Think with me for a minute about our experience of coming to worship on Sunday mornings. As a congregation we try to be careful to not misuse this space. Although, I have to admit that we have had a rap concert here once for the JPD Warrior Foundation. It was a concert for the youth that had the message that God does not want you to take your own life. Suicide is not the answer God has for you.

Recently, we have been blessed by Mark Donner treating us to special music during our worship. I often question whether we should be clapping when a song is over. I think Mark would admit that he is not singing a concert here, but rather his voice is an offering to the Lord. And yes I know that sometimes the music moves us so that we cannot help ourselves and clap. We come to worship not for a concert, and we hope to experience the transcendence of God.

We here at CTS have started a practice of quiet time to center ourselves for worship. As I was growing up, once we entered the sanctuary we quietly sat and welcomed each other and the visitor quietly while we listened to the prelude by the organist. There was time after worship for more fellowship.

Announcements are another thing of contention. A new pastor, I experienced at Holy Cross during my internship, completely got rid of announcements. They had the ability to post them on an overhead screen. Here we do take time to give announcements that are for the glory of God. I don't think our announcement time gets out of hand so that we lose our focus on the purpose for which we gather, to worship God and renew our faith.

Yes, in our text for today after Jesus clears the bazaar from the temple, the question now shifts to another one. The Jews ask, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" They wanted to know by what authority Jesus comes to disrupt this goings on in the temple. And when Jesus answers, the focus is

then put on his death and resurrection. Jesus is trying to tell the Jews that the temple is no longer to be thought of as a specific structure in Jerusalem, but rather it is found in the person of Jesus Christ.

So where is our temple today? Do we really need a building as a sacred worship space? Certainly during the past year, we can see that many churches have not gathered in their sanctuaries due to COVID-19. Does that mean that they are not experiencing God? I think not. Even here at CTS, we worshiped together on facebook for several months and joined together at the communion table as we drove through the parking lot. The temple of God is found in the hearts and minds of those who claim Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Yes, certainly it is true that it is easier to worship in a building so we can be all together, but can we not give thanks to God for creation as we sit on a quiet morning in our tree stand while hunting? Can we not give thanks to our God when we work at the Lord's Cupboard giving food to our neighbors who are food insecure? Can we not offer thanks to God for a meal that a local restaurant prepared? Can we not feel the presence of God as we read His Word during our early morning devotion at our own kitchen table? God is at work in all those places and we need to see ourselves as God's temple as we live in His world today.

Lent is a wonderful time to do some introspection. Think about how we often forget the Lord and don't see him in the mundane things we do in life. Quite similar to allowing our souls to become marketplaces instead of temples? I hope that we can all find time to look inside ourselves and see where we have strayed from the righteousness of God. And do some spring cleaning, if you will. Let God in. Mind, body and soul are all worthy places for the Holy Spirit to work within you.

1 Corinthians 6:9 says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?" And verse 20, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body."

Jesus died on the cross for our sins and he rose again on the third day for our salvation. God sent us the Holy Spirit to guide us through this life into the next, so let's try to make our lives a worthy place for the Spirit of God to dwell.