

Sermon Lent 3 2018

March 4, 2018

John 2:12-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson which was previously read.

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. This is quite an entrance isn't it? Going into the temple—no small space—but going into the temple and driving all of these people out. Now, if you noticed, this is the second chapter of John, which means it's close to the beginning. In fact, I make that point because this is the first time Jesus goes into the temple in the Gospel of John. Interesting, isn't it? Here Jesus has been pointed to as the Lamb of God by John the Baptist, and now that Lamb of God is going into the temple. Do you see the significance of this? Or at least some of it?

Think about what happened in the temple. Sacrifices, right? And here the Lamb, the sacrifice was going into the temple. And what was He doing? Cleansing it. I think we have to draw something theological here from this. Do you remember the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament? Some of you probably do and some don't, that's OK. The Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur, was the biggest day on the Jewish calendar in a lot of ways. What happened on that day was that the High Priest would take a sacrifice, a goat, and he would slaughter it, he would slaughter it on the altar that was in the temple area. Then, he would take that blood of the goat, and he would spread it on the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, in what was called the Tent of Meeting. He would go behind the curtain of the temple, spread that blood on the Ark, and then he would come back with the blood and sprinkle it on the altar outside the Tent again.

What's the connection? Well, you see, on that altar, day in and day out, in fact morning and evening every day, sacrifices were brought. These sacrifices were for all of the sins of the people. All the things they did wrong, every time they became unclean in some way, any time they were sinned against, they brought sacrifices. And what they were doing is leaving the junk of that sin, that uncleanness—through

the sacrifice—they were unloading all of that on the altar. They were unloading it all on God. And what Yom Kippur did was to bring God’s holiness and cover over it. It dealt with all of it. The blood of the goat was shed to take care of all of the refuse that the people accumulated over the last year. So, in a sense the blood of the goat came with God’s holiness from His presence at the Ark, and it cleansed the temple.

Now if you noticed I said Jesus was the Lamb and on the Day of Atonement they used a goat. Well, that’s where it becomes important that this happens during the Passover. You see, the Passover wasn’t about the cleansing of the temple in the same sense, instead it was the sacrificing of a lamb to cover over them in that lamb’s blood. Here today, they meet that in Christ—which by the way makes sense because all of this points to Christ. All of the Old Testament is about Jesus.

In fact, if you’ll indulge me for a second, I’ll make that point even more so in this. Consider that Jesus is not only the Lamb, but the King as well. In the Second Book of Chronicles, we see two kings also cleanse the Temple. We see it chapter 29 where the good king Hezekiah cleanses it, calling the Levites, the priests, to consecrate themselves, consecrate the **“house of the Lord,”** and to carry out **“the filth from the Holy Place.”** Notice he called it the “house of the Lord,” by the way. That’s in chapter 29. In chapter 34 King Josiah rediscovers the Law, the Torah, or the books by Moses, that had been lost to Israel. And he goes to the Temple, to the house of the Lord and has the book read, rending his clothes in repentant sadness that the book had been lost, and restoring the temple to its proper use. In these we get a picture of Jesus. These Kings cleansing the temple, just like Jesus.

Now as I describe all of this, and I make the point it’s pointing to Jesus, we have to ask what should we be taking from this about Jesus? Well, as we look at the story, we get a clear picture of it all. Jesus is cleansing the Temple, yes out of zeal for the proper worship, out of the concern that how God has called the Israelites to worship might not be corrupted by selfish gain. But He has an even greater point that comes about through it. What’s point? That He is now the temple.

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore 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.

In the age of the Old Testament, the temple was the center of everything. It was where God had told them to gather together. It was where God had told them to perform their sacrifices. But all of this wasn't the main point. The main point was something even greater. The main point of the temple was fixing what had been broken in the fall in to sin. What was that? Well, you know I always speak of the consequence of sin as death, but why does sin cause death? Because Adam and Eve had to be cast from the garden where the Tree of Life was. But you see the Tree of Life wasn't the only thing. Along with the Tree, they couldn't walk with God face to face. The ultimate problem was that God wouldn't be with them. And so the temple was a fix for that. As God said to the Israelites in Exodus 29 **"[The sacrifices] shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory."** God would meet with His people in the temple. He would meet with them there, speak to them there, and make them holy there. And elsewhere He says that He does this by causing His name to dwell there.

Well, you see what Jesus is saying. You see how it's such a huge statement. It's a whole paradigm shift, as we say in our time. It's all changing. The temple isn't where God will be with them. Well it is, but not the temple of Jerusalem. Now the temple is Jesus. Now God's name dwells in Jesus. As Jesus said in John chapter 8, **"Before Abraham was, I AM,"** He showed that He is God in the flesh of man. Luther said it this way, *"Now in the New Testament the name of God dwells in Christ and the church, which is one body with Christ. There we have the word of God, baptism, the Lord's Supper and the exercise of the obedience to God."*

In other words, now God dwells with us in Jesus. Now if you want to find God, you find Him in His body, the Church. You find Him where God speaks, where He baptizes, where He gives His Holy Meal. And think about how that works. Where were you joined to Jesus? In your baptism. How so? You were buried in His death and raised in His resurrection. You were clothed in Him. He came there in the Name, in the Word with that water, and He met with you. Where else does He come to you? His body and blood at His Supper. There He is coming to you meeting you with that very body nailed to the cross, that blood shed for you on that altar of the cross, the sacrifice of the lamb, here for you.

Now this is hard for us to grasp a bit because we are so used to thinking about God being everywhere, but this is something we see all over the Scriptures. God promising to be somewhere for His people. In fact, as we say this, we have a particular promise of comfort in the New Testament, that He comes to you in Christ.

As I have been talking about all of this, it's been pretty abstract. I'd like to speak of this comfort in a way that makes this a bit more concrete. As I was reading, I am sure you heard Jesus driving people out. But did you hear who he talked specifically to? Off the top of your head you might think the priests, or the Pharisees, one of His usual opponents. But not this time. This time it says that He spoke to those who **“who sold the pigeons, ‘Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.’”** As you hear that, do you know why that's significant? Think about it. Do you remember pigeons being spoken of in relation to the temple in Jesus' life? If you recall, that's the sacrifice Mary brought at the presentation of Jesus, when she had to sacrifice after the birth of Jesus for her purification. Now the Law said it was to be a lamb but if someone couldn't afford that, there was a provision. You could bring pigeons, turtle doves. I think Jesus is talking to the sellers of the pigeons, because in the midst of all of this, they are the ones who are scamming the poor. The poor can't afford the other sacrifice, and yet these sellers are extorting from them all they can get.

The point is, Jesus cares for the poor. Your sin is poverty, and Jesus has come to you, God has come to you in that poverty and brought the riches of His righteousness to you. What He has done is that He has carried your sin to that altar of the cross and bled for it, covering it with His holiness. He has come to you in Your uncleanness, He has taken that on Himself, and in exchange He has given you His cleanness. With His righteousness He has cleansed you. In fact, now when He comes to you, He promises to dwell in you. Your bodies are temples too, because you are in the body of Christ. As He comes to you in Baptism, in that Word, in that Supper, He cleanses you. Just like He entered into that temple and cleansed it, He comes to you and cleanses you. He meets with you, He overcomes that problem of sin, and dwells with you. That's what He does as the Lamb, as the King, as the New Temple where God is with us. Amen.