

“There Was a New Temple in Town”

John 2:13-22

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent 2021; March 7, 2021

Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Rifle, Colorado

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The people of Israel didn't quite know it yet, but there was a new temple in town.

It was the feast of Passover. Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He went to the temple. In the temple compound itself, He saw oxen and sheep and rows of cages with doves in them. He saw tables, kiosks let's say, of bankers providing a currency exchange.

At some time in the recent past from that day—we don't know when, somebody must have thought that there was a lot of money to be made at the temple off the sacrifices and Passover that God had instituted. Jews and god-fearing Gentiles came to Jerusalem from all over the Roman world for Passover. Thus, someone thought that there could be a lot of money to be made from exchanging currency, undoubtedly for a fee, for a percentage. So they set up a company and went into business at the temple.

And what a business plan it was: a captive audience; making money off what God had commanded. People didn't have much choice if they wanted to participate in Passover and abide by the sacrifices prescribed in the law of Moses. So they set up shop and conducted business right in the temple compound. They made a business out of the worship of God and the sacrificial and festival system. Those things were intended by God for worship and provision of promises of forgiveness and His grace under that system. Worship of God and redemption became a commercial enterprise for personal gain.

And the keepers of the temple must have had a stake in this. Charging rent to the enterprisers. Maybe a take on the side.

Jesus saw all of this. He was motivated by zeal for God's house. The very things of God's house were not to be sold for personal gain. So He found some cords of some sort of material that can be made into a rope. This was a rope that became a whip. He proceeded to drive out from the temple compound all the oxen and the sheep.

If we had been there, we could have heard it. Mooing oxen. Baying sheep. The crack of the whip. The sound of hooves on ground and pavement. Shouts of the tenders of the livestock: “Hey, What do you think you are doing?” The dust rising.

You hear Jesus say to those selling doves: “Get these out of here.” You see Jesus pour out the containers where the money changers kept the coins. You see Jesus overturn the tables of the money changers. You see something else, itself invisible, but the effect quite obvious: the authority and presence Jesus commands. Take all of this to marketplace, where it belongs.

What a commotion? Not your docile, go with the flow Jesus. Here is a man who is a man of God's word. Here is a man who is a man of principle. Here is a man who has a zeal that the very things of God's worship not be sold for personal gain by the commercial enterprisers.

The keepers of the temple confront Him. They undoubtedly had a financial stake in all of this. “Show us a sign Jesus since you are doing these things.” Translated this means: Jesus you have to have authority from God to do what you are doing here. Otherwise, we will just keep on doing what we have been doing according to our own devising. This sign must be some miracle to be done on our demand. Then you will show us the proof that you have the authority to over turn what we are doing.

But why couldn't they just see how badly they had corrupted the worship of God that had

been entrusted to their care? Isn't it obvious that bilking the people in turning the worship of God into a business enterprise for personal gain was contrary to the will of God? Didn't they read the prophets?

But Jesus took upon Himself the prerogative to determine what should go on in the house of God.

There is a sign of Jesus's authority to determine what goes on in God's house. There is an act Jesus will do by which He demonstrates His authority for these things. But it is not the kind of miraculous act they were expecting. They were expecting something like the things Moses did in front of Pharaoh at the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt. Maybe something like magic tricks. But Jesus does not give them anything like that.

Here is the sign Jesus gives: "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up in three days" (John 2:19). Jesus's response is sort of like a parable. It is sort of mysterious. Though it is quite literal for those who see who Jesus is. Jesus was speaking of His own body; His own body as the temple of God. But John tells us that this seeing did not become clear until the sign Jesus would give: the raising it up in three days when He had risen from the dead.

The keepers of the temple were thinking along very regular human lines and what was naturally possible to human understanding when they heard what Jesus said. And thinking that way, they completely misunderstood what Jesus meant. They took Jesus's words quite literally with respect to stone and mortar. So they rejected Jesus's words about raising up the temple as nonsense. "It took forty-six years to build this temple. Will you raise it up in three days?" (John 2:20).

They must have thought Jesus a little stupid. How easy it is to dismiss Him on the basis of human naturalistic knowledge of physical things.

But hey, didn't He exercise some sort of divine power, some sort of divine presence, we might say? Didn't He speak of the temple as His Father's house? He couldn't really be that stupid could He? And wasn't He really in the right after all, according to God's word and truth?

And yet, the keepers of the temple, the keepers of the "true knowledge," rejected His right to call their understanding into question and to give Him the benefit of faith that He knows what He is talking about.

And then they also missed what else He said. He told them ahead of time what they were going to do. Destroy this temple, Jesus said. They were going to do once again with the temple whatever they willed; the temple that was Jesus's body, not the brick and mortar. They had the opportunity to repent and turn. But they didn't hear. They would try to destroy the temple, by trying to destroy Jesus. But God would raise Jesus on the third day.

With the resurrection of Jesus, it becomes evident that Jesus was not talking about the temple made of stone and mortar on that day during Passover. He was talking about His own body, which is the temple of God.

In the resurrection of Jesus the power of God over death is manifested; so the power of life itself is demonstrated and seen. In the resurrection of Jesus the grace and righteousness of God has triumphed over evil.

The temple is where God's name is (Deuteronomy 12:5). The temple is where we expect God to be manifest in ways that are essential to God: life, and righteousness, and grace; and where we expect God to bring life, and justification, and grace to us. In the resurrection of Jesus, God demonstrates these things conclusively.

There was a new temple in town. He was the Son in human flesh appearing, to be destroyed by the keepers of the brick and mortar temple but to be raised by God as His temple on the third

day.

And now maybe there is an even deeper meaning to His driving out the sacrificial animals from the temple in Jerusalem that day. The sacrifice of animals was being driven out of that stone and mortar temple of God, just as that stone and mortar temple of God was also passing away into something infinitely more important. The Son Himself, who had come to the temple of His Father, now being the temple of His Father, as the Son, would be the sacrifice that takes away the sins of the people, and yes, indeed, the sins of the whole world; and yes, our sins.

And so we are gathered here in His Name, the Name of Jesus, who is Himself the temple of God. And as He has called us to Himself by penitence and faith, He sanctifies us here by His own blood to be His temple as He, the temple of God, is here with us. And He feeds us here with His body given and risen, that body that is God's temple. And He feeds us with His blood shed in atoning sacrifice, the promise of life and salvation, the blood that sanctifies us before God. He assures our faith, I have obtained the forgiveness of your sins. He sends us forth in His peace.

There is a new temple in town, we can say. His name is Jesus, crucified for all sin, risen and living in indestructible life. And we can say, too that we are God's temple, as Jesus the temple of God is here present with us and gives us His body. How cool is that? It's the coolest thing on earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.