

John 2:13-22 (New Revised Standard Version)

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 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. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.

When some thieves broke through a wall and robbed my store
it wasn't about just what they stole and the mess they had made.
My business insurance covered most of the financial loss,
but I felt personally violated by what they did in **my space**.

I am reminded of how that felt by this passage from the Gospel of John,
when Jesus responded to the commerce being done in God's Temple
with anger toward what was incredibly wrong on so many levels.

The passage we just heard read from John is a very familiar story,
and an important event that's included in all four of the Gospels.
John writes about this event very early in his Gospel
which has several layers of meaning, message and complexity
to introduce who Jesus is and what he came to accomplish.

The context as John explains it, was during the Passover holy days.
Any Jewish person who was living within a few day's travel,
was expected to make a sacrifice at the Temple during Passover,
so you can imagine the huge crowds and chaos in Jerusalem.

The story occurs in an area of the Temple grounds, a courtyard
that was set aside as a place for gentiles, for the lame and unclean,
since they were not allowed to worship inside the Temple itself.

Since only animals flawless and without blemish could be sacrificed,
and they had to pass a close inspection done by the Temple priests,
most travelers would purchase **at an inflated price**,
an animal certified acceptable there at the Temple.

Since Roman coins all had the image of Caesar stamped on them,
which was considered to be an idol, those coins were unacceptable,
and had to be exchanged for Jewish money at the Temple,
which was also a fairly lucrative arrangement for the Temple priests.

Jesus sees all that money making activity going on **at the Temple**,
hears all the commotion of the vendors selling certified animals,

and watches them profiteering by exchanging the foreign money...

...in the space that's specifically set aside for gentiles & outcasts,

so he drives the vendors & their animals out of the temple,
and flips over the tables of the temple money-changers.

At the most basic and obvious level, all that commercial activity
was not appropriate at the dwelling place of God's holy presence
or spiritually conducive to anyone's worship of the Lord God,
which was supposed to be the point & purpose of the Temple.

To take it a bit further and deeper, what Jesus did at the Temple
was **a symbolic-prophetic action**, a sign pointing toward
how Jesus came to fulfill the promises of the OT prophecies,
and God's plan, purpose & intention to heal & save humanity.

Many of the OT prophets had long complained and warned against
performing religious rituals and sacrifices that meant nothing
because they were outward for show and not of the heart,
which made their worship a false & meaningless travesty.

They were treating Almighty God like a crass commercial enterprise,
who would respond with mercy, favor and blessings if they
would just perform the right religious ritual correctly...
... which reduces faith and righteousness to a business transaction,
and shifts the focus away from God's goodness and grace
to a greater emphasis on human activity and good works.

It's no surprise or shock that Jesus was offended and incensed
that they were reducing **God's house into a house of commerce**,
and God's grace & love into a commodity that was for sale. vs. 16
"Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

The phrase, *My Father's house*

infers that he is the Son of the God who dwells in that Temple,
and that he does have authority to disrupt their Temple commerce.

Then recognizing that challenge to their authority and profits,
the Temple leaders demanded a sign from Jesus, that he show them
by what authority he disrupted their Temple business. vs.18-19

The religious authorities then said to Jesus, "What sign can you show us?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The religious authorities take his answer quite literally,
and declare that his claim to rebuild in 3 days is impossible,
though after his resurrection it's clear that Jesus
was speaking symbolically, on a much deeper level, vs. 21-22

But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.

To go a little bit deeper and further, it was understood by all that
the Temple represented the very presence and dwelling place of God,
but when Jesus came, he himself was the presence of God.

That is the point being explained at the beginning of John, vs. 1:1-2, 16

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and **the Word was God**. He was in the beginning with God. **And the Word became flesh and lived among us**, ... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

Those verses help explain the wonderful truth that in Jesus,
God poured himself into a human body and lived among humankind.

The point and theology behind the disturbance at the Temple
was a prophetic and symbolic action that served to identify him,
that Jesus himself was the Temple, the dwelling place of God.

By driving out all those animals,
Jesus probably shut down the animal sacrifice for that day,
thus ending their commerce and temple rituals for that day...
which was also a sign that foreshadowed what was to come.

**Jesus was pointing toward his mission and purpose,
to what his life & ministry were going to accomplish.**

Jesus didn't come merely to clean the temple, he came to replace it.
Jesus himself became the sacrifice for our sin,
so the killing of animals would be no longer needed,
ending the ritual of animal sacrifice in the Temple.

The ritual of animal sacrifice never really took away human sin,
but was a temporary sign of repentance and God's mercy,
that pointed ahead to what Jesus had been sent to do,
and so he was both **the sacrifice for sin and the Temple of God.**

It never was the architecture or the building materials that made
the Temple a holy and sacred place ... it was the presence of God.

And then to go still a bit further and deeper, and closer to home,
that also means that since the Church is now **the body of Christ**,
just as Jesus promised, whenever we are gathered in his name,
together **we become the presence and dwelling place of God...**

... which is what Jesus meant when he said in Matthew 18:20

For where two or three are gathered in my name, **I am there among them.**

Or as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, 1 Cor. 3:16

Do you not know that **together you are God's temple** and that God's Spirit dwells among you?

That truth is why our shared worship and life together as a church,
are so significant, meaningful, important, **and necessary**
for a Christian to grow & respond faithfully to God's grace.

It's because when we are gathered in worship, in the name of Jesus,
together we become the Temple, the very dwelling place of God,
against which, even the gates of hell cannot prevail...

... and that is the awesome power and presence of God's gracious love.

So here we are, three weeks into Lent,
along our spiritual journey in preparation for Easter,
and this passage points toward who we are, the body of Christ.

But sometimes in the rush, busyness and demands of our lives,
I think we forget about who we really are, a dwelling place of God.

In this world we are constantly being measured and judged,
we are evaluated in ways that deny and devalue the truth,
that we are, every one of us gifted, blessed and uniquely loved,
each a precious child of God and recipient of God favor & grace,
**and that the Lord intends for grace and hope to flow through us,
and for us to reflect that love & truth, promise & presence of God.**

We all know that life can be difficult and our problems overwhelming.
We know what it is to feel defeated, discouraged and unworthy,
and the weight of disappointment and trouble can be crushing.

Our Lord intends for us to walk in joyful faithfulness with him,
but sometimes this world and our own desires can distract us,
and so we pursue lesser, deficient and unworthy goals
for a people so loved and upheld by the grace of God.

So as I thought about that in my own prayer and meditation this week,
I found myself reminded of many instances of someone used by God,
sometimes to challenge me to live more faithfully & truthfully
or when God used an unexpected someone to bless & strengthen
by saying or doing just the right thing at the right time,

and by their affirmation, encouragement and reminder of hope
made the grace and promises of God feel more real and immediate,
which made a difference along my spiritual journey & faith.

My suggestion this week, as an active part of our Lenten journey,
is that we should each pray for the Spirit to guide & make known:

1st – where is there a need to do a little temple cleaning in me
so that I am on track with God's will and plan for my life?

2nd – who by our spoken word, phone call, text, hug, email or note,
we might affirm, encourage, appreciate, uplift or empower,
with a reminder of God's amazing love and endless grace,
and that they most certainly continue to be
a beloved, blessed & precious child of God?

**The authenticity of God's presence and gracious love in our lives,
is reflected by our own love and compassion toward other people.**
We're to respond to the love that we ourselves have received
by loving all those others God sends **for us to reflect grace.**

**Today we have come to share the Lord's Table of gracious love & power,
the gift of sacrament and mystery, of God's presence and blessing,
where we remember and celebrate our hope & life in Jesus Christ...**

... as the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 3:15 & 17

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called **in the one body**. And be thankful. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.