

## Sermon Text – Sunday, March 3, 2024 – Pastor Paula Kraus

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Exodus 20:1-17; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: I Corinthians 1:18-25**  
**Scripture for Message: John 2:13-22 “Worthy”**

“Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace” – Jesus felt righteous indignation at what was going on in the temple that day. This temple was God’s house, and God deserved respect and honor not the type of chaos and confusion that goes on in a marketplace. In the Middle East, at that time, temples were sacred residences of the gods. The Temple in Jerusalem was where the presence of the God of Abraham and Israel existed – it was God’s house. Jesus believed, and proved, that the religious leaders in charge of the Temple had so desecrated it that there was no respect or honor shown God. The Jewish religious leaders exhibited spiritual corruption by deviating from the true worship of God in favor of political and economic expediency.

We read from Exodus the “Ten Commandments” which begin with these words – I am the Lord your God . . . you shall have no other gods before me. This is a statement that shows God commands respect and honor. In fact, the commandments begin by emphasizing human loyalty to God and then continue to teach people to honor human rights in gratitude to God. According to theology professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Georgia, Raj Nadella, “Loyalty to God is expressed in how we treat the vulnerable.”

The actions that Jesus observed in the Temple that day did not show honor and respect to God, his father. The sellers and money changers dishonored the temple and “by dishonoring the temple, one also dishonored all of its personnel, from high priest down, including the One who commanded its construction and occasionally dwelled there – God.”<sup>1</sup> These actions ignited Jesus righteous indignation and anger – compelling him to “clear” the temple of those who dishonored and disrespected his father. It is also important to note that the area where the vendors and money changers exhibited their wares was where the gentile people, or the non-Jewish people came to worship God – they were the vulnerable ones, the aliens, in that community and this “marketplace” detracted from their ability to worship.

This action of overturning tables and driving out the vendors had no lasting effect – they would be back at it the following day. Furthermore, the money changers and the dove sellers were there to help the people obtain what the Torah required for the sacrificial rituals. These activities provided for the temple’s operating expenses, they benefitted both the temple workers and the community at large. One can, in that light, understand why the Jews questioned him to ask,

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<sup>1</sup> Malina, Bruce J. & Rohrbaugh, Richard L. *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Fortress Press. 1998. 79. print.

“What sign can you show us for doing this?” or as other Gospel accounts record – “By who’s authority?”

Maybe we see both sides of this issue – Jesus demanded the respect and honor due God and in his eyes it was not given. The people were not treating the Temple as the sacred space God intended. The Jews on the other hand felt they were doing what was needed to keep the Temple operating and available for worship and sacrifice. But maybe this wasn’t so much about the “building” as it was about God’s presence. When the religious leaders questioned his authority, Jesus’ response was “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Of course taken out of context the Jews didn’t understand – they completely misunderstood Jesus and resented his claim that a Temple that took forty-six years to construct could be “raised” in three days. Even his own disciples misunderstood until after Jesus’ resurrection.

John explains that Jesus was talking about his own body – the body of Christ is God’s temple. Jesus himself is the embodiment of God’s presence, therefore Jesus himself was the sign of authority compelling him to act when the leaders dishonored or disrespected God. So, I wonder if Jesus righteous anger was more about the contempt and disrespect given to God’s presence – whether it is in the Temple or in the body of Christ. Jesus was not only angry about the way his they treated his Father’s house but also angry about the lack of loyalty shown to God by disrespecting the vulnerable among them. Jesus’ fervor for God’s honor would ultimately destroy his life – “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

I wonder if Jesus was illustrating to the religious leaders, his disciples, and to us to attend to the vulnerable, even at the risk of our own interests, the interests of the Temple rulers and the political rulers. Just as the Temple did in Jesus’ time, the church in the United States and around the globe, despite declining numbers, wields enormous political and economic power.

In his statement, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days” Jesus hints at his death and resurrection and that is what the disciples came to believe after Jesus’ resurrection. We can also expand our focus to a broader definition of the body of Christ and believe that the temple Jesus refers to is the beloved community of believers who worship in temples grand and small all over the globe today. Even if the whole thing were blown up today, it wouldn’t take long for the body of Christ to resurrect in one form or another. We see it happen everywhere – arsonists burn churches to the ground, or the building is completely levelled by hurricane, flood, or tornado yet the body returns again and again to worship. In our own region of PA, a disciples’ church that had been in existence since 1831 could not see its way into the future and decided to turn

assets over to the region only two years ago, but in that church has been 54 weeks of continual worship to this day. You can't stop the power of the body of Christ. You see the power in the body of Christ lies not in the structures created by human hands but in the structure or church not made with hands, an impregnable movement more lasting than market forces can facilitate or imagine.

Just imagine how that power could be leveraged to make positive changes in our world today. Think about the enormous political and economic power the body of Christ could employ. Of course, the body would have to have its mind focused on divine things and not things of this world – the body would have to put God's honor and glory above all things. So, what's my point? Well – I wonder if the point is the same as Jesus was trying to make – “How dare you turn my Father's house into a market.” How dare we monetize a relationship with God by seeking to benefit financially from our labors.

I wonder if the message today for the church is to complete Jesus' mission to the poor and vulnerable of this world – to do otherwise would be to dishonor God. Our readings from the Psalms “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord,” and the words from Exodus 20 verse 1-11 are messages for us to honor God. God is worthy of honor and glory – true worship is worship that honors God. True worship, in my opinion, is worship that continues Jesus' mission – to preach good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and to release the oppressed.

How do we do that? Of course, we want something attractive to inspire people who want to worship. We want a safe and comfortable place for our worship – is that only found in a building? Is the “Temple” built and maintained by human hands the only thing that matters for our worship? It does matter that we have shelter from the elements, warmth in winter and a place of refuge from the summer's heat. It does matter that our facilities are in proper operating condition i.e., plumbing that works, safe electrical equipment, and equipment that adequately aids a meaningful worship experience. We don't want to be known as that “shabby church” on the corner, so we make improvements. All of that does not make us into the “market” that Jesus refers to, it is what we do with those things that could dishonor God. Do we, as the body of Christ, do everything to honor God?

We do preach the gospel to all who come and desire to hear it. We use the tithes and offerings received to provide for the vulnerable in our own community and beyond. We offer space for the vulnerable to gather in ways that help them deal with the struggles of life, through the groups that meet here, the GED classes and the Career-link assistance provided. When we ask ourselves what we do to honor God and complete Jesus' mission we can look to those

things. But maybe we need to take a closer look and reflect on the reasons why we do the things we do, and how we treat the vulnerable in our midst.

Do we provide space for groups and organizations because it gives us some income for the times when we are not in worship? Do we open our doors, pretending hospitality, and then complain about those who enter in? I wonder sometimes if our welcome is truly welcoming of others – I am guilty of judgment at times. We can look at this scene from scripture and see it as Jesus judging the vendors in the temple – and we can look at this scene and see Jesus judging us for how we are less than accommodating of the vulnerable among us.

When we think about making the “temple” safe for worship – we might also consider how we as members of Christ’s body are the temple and how we individually and corporately create safety for others. Do we judge others by their clothing or appearance? Do we allow others to worship in their own way, or do we expect conformity? Do we, like the vendors and money changers that Jesus drove out of the temple, sell only our ideas and doctrine or do we open our hearts and minds to listen to what others have to offer. I wonder if Jesus’ idea of honoring his Father’s house included allowing everyone in God’s kingdom safety to worship God. Worship without judgment, worship without forcing conformity on others. I wonder if that means we, as the body of Christ where God’s presence resides, must leave judgment behind and accept those who might be different or whose beliefs do not fit our molds.

I think we can get closer to being a place of true worship when we realize that Jesus is telling the disciples, the religious leaders of his time, and us that the body of Christ is something not made with human hands and is sacred and eternal. God builds the body of Christ to honor God in all things.