

“Temple Temper”  
John 2: 13 – 22  
Makemie Presbyterian Church  
March 15, 2009

John 2:13-22

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.

This ends the reading of God’s word.

Over the internet we have folks visiting our website; reading the sermons, listening to the choir singing & in general checking us out. Online & received a message from an attorney in California who explained that he had been asked as an attorney to teach a class to the adults in his church on the causes for the arrest & the trial & the execution of Jesus of Nazareth. He wanted to know my opinion of what really were the prompting causes that led to the arrest of Jesus.

I indicated of course that there were disagreements between Jesus & many of the religious interpreters of scripture as to what was the will of God. But the one event I said that all four gospel writers agree was directly related to his death was the behavior of Jesus in the temple, his temple temper, in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover.

As you know, as Ted just read, he did what is traditionally called "the cleansing of the temple." Now that's putting a very positive spin on what happened. Not that I haven't used that expression myself lots of times, but that's actually not the case. Cleansing the temple sounds like on April 18<sup>th</sup> from 9 a.m. to noon, they've declared a workday at the temple & now we're all going to clean everything up. The fact of matter is that at Passover time, Jesus trashed the temple.

Let me explain. Passover was one of the major festivals of the Jewish people. They came from miles around as pilgrims to worship in Jerusalem. There was only one temple, it was in Jerusalem. Passover required the slaughter of a lamb, one year old lamb; with certain instructions in reference to the meat & to the blood. And later the families would have a meal of spring lamb. But in order to be purified for worship there were ceremonies that required a young calf or a sheep or if you were poor then there were provisions for you to substitute a couple of doves or pigeons instead of an animal. This was all a part of the ritual system central to the life of the people. Passover was Christmas & Easter & the Fourth of July all rolled into one. It was a religious holiday, but it was a holiday celebrating the freedom of the Jewish people from the bondage in Egypt. It was a grand occasion & Jerusalem was crowded to the gills with people there for this.

Jesus himself came to Jerusalem & he was there for the Passover feast. In fact that was last meal that Jesus had with his disciples. The Passover meal. When he came to the temple he found that the provision had been made for all the people who came to have an animal. Temporary corrals were set up on the pavilion, the

flagstone area out in front of & on either side of the temple. As you know the worshipers didn't go in the temple. So Jesus isn't inside the temple. The animals are not inside the temple. Only the high priests & only the priests went inside. The worshipers were outside. These small corrals & cages for the birds were set up there & tables for those who would sell you the animals; make change, change your money, that sort of thing, all in place ready for the Passover.

Jesus made a whip & he went charging in there & pulled down the corrals & let these cows & calves go running in the streets. Released from the corral the sheep & they went a scooting & a scurrying everywhere. Released the birds & there were feathers & squawking everywhere, & he took the tables where the people were sitting to sell & he flipped the tables over & said, "Get out of here."

He trashed it. Why?

If it was a casino we'd say, "Get it Jesus."

If it was a saloon selling to minors we would say, "Go in there with a ball bat & break all the bottles if they don't know any better than that."

But this is the house of God. Why?

There are people who use this story to indicate to themselves to their own satisfaction that Jesus was anti-temple. That is he was anti-structured religion, he was anti-institution, he was anti-sacred buildings. There is no evidence anywhere that that's true. When he was six weeks old he was taken to the temple for dedication. When he was bar mitzvahed at age twelve he went to the temple. And where ever he was during the week, when the sabbath came he went into the temple substitute, the synagogue & worshiped on the sabbath day. And after he was gone his followers gathered in the temple & came there everyday at 9 in the morning & 3 in the afternoon for the hours of prayer. There is no indication that he was against temple. That's not in our Bible. We made that up.

Of course there were people who were against temple. You know how people do who never go to church that talk about

"Yeah put up those buildings & all when I can worship God just as well here in my Lazy-boy." Well the ones that I've seen in their Lazy-boys flipping channels didn't seem to be worshipping.

"I can do just as well sitting here in my house or I can worship God at my kid's soccer games." Well, I haven't seen it, but maybe. But we've all heard it.

And I'm sure there were people who longed for the days before the temple when Israel had only a tent. Now those were the real days. Just give me that old time religion before we had this temple & all this fancy stuff, back when we just had that tent. Now we're getting back to it. That's the real stuff. I used to hear that when I would go preach at camp meetings. Yeah, at camp meetings people would say, "This is where it really is. Not at those churches in town. But out here fighting these mosquitoes & uh, uh watching these lizards run over our feet & just sweating like crazy & nothing but a fan from a funeral home, now this is really a..."

I didn't believe it. I mean it's nice but two nights out there; if you've got a nice home & a nice church somewhere else, but make that the main menu, I don't think so, but it sounds good.

I have no evidence that Jesus was against temple. All the people of God, all the people of God, in the days of Israel & in the churches have mixed feelings about houses of God. When the temple was dedicated, Solomon built the first temple, when it was dedicated he made a speech & had a prayer & this is his prayer,

"God forgive us for what we are doing here. We know that you don't need this building but we do. Amen."

There are some that think the reason why Jesus was in such a fury was prompted by his objection to the way the whole worship area was laid out. Let me remind you that in the temple there was sanctuary within the sanctuary, inside the inside, a place called the holy of holies where only the high priest went once a year. In the less but next holy place the priests went every day with their ministrations & prayers. The worshipers never went inside. They were outside. Now who were the worshipers? They were the men. So you have the high priest, then you have the priests, then you have the men, & then they had a place roped off for the women, way in the back of beyond. And then beyond that barely within hearing shot of the whole thing is a place for those who wanted to follow & believed in God but were not Jewish. The outsiders, the strangers, the gentiles. So there was an order for worship; High priests, priests, men, women, gentiles. There are some who believe this is what Jesus temper objected to; this structure of worship. And we do know, we do know, that in his own ministry he did not make these distinctions. Jesus didn't say, "Oh no, oh yes, not you you're a female, oh yes you you're a male, oh no not you, you're a gentile."

He didn't do any of that. But we still have no evidence that he objected to the arrangement that was there from the very beginning. No evidence.

There are some who think & have a good case that the reason Jesus did it was they were selling animals there. Now I don't know. I don't think so. I think I could make a good argument for the fact that selling the animals there was a service to the worshippers. If you walked 80 miles -- took you three or four days & you came all that distance & you got there you would want to be able to buy a sheep for your worship. You didn't want to haul a sheep 80 miles on your shoulders. It was a nice service, just get one when you get there. But people say, "Yes, but you see, they had them over a barrel. They could fix the price, they could be price gouging, & what are you going to do, run home & get one. It's this or nothing."

Now that possibility is there. But there is no evidence that there was any price gouging going on, not at all.

I do know this, that when people come to worship, really worship, the one thing everyone wants is an experience of God & they will do what it takes to get it. This is why fakey evangelists go off with truck loads of money, is because people have enough guilt

combined with such a strong desire to know God that they'll just do anything, pay anything, give anything, if it will bring me closer to God, & these people are vulnerable & could be taken advantage of, I don't know.

I do know it sounds kind of strange to go to a place of worship & have somebody ask you, "Do you have the money?" There are some places you don't ask that. Now you can ask that if you're going into a furniture store. You can, especially currently, ask that at the car lot. You can ask that at the real estate office. But when you go in line at the cafeteria & you're a poor child at school & you're hungry & somebody says to you, "But do you have the money?" It's a bad question. It's an out of order question. If you go into the courts & you're poor & the judge says, "No money, no justice." Bad question.

If you ever go to a church & you're given the impression that you have to have a certain amount of money, you can write this & take it to the bank; that's not a church. No. Not a church.

But I don't know if that's it. You know what I think is it? I know you're anxious to hear, let me tell you. I think what happened at the temple is the same thing that happens to all good, fine, well meaning institutions when they get fixed & harden in place & lose their original

purpose. It can happen to a temple, it can happen to a church, it can happen to a school, it can happen to a government; that starts out serving the needs of people, meeting the needs of people & then something happens in the course of time & now the people are serving the institutions and not taking care of each other. And we never remember what day it was that it happened. It just drifted into it. Somebody has to come along & say, "Now what's the point again?"

Now Jesus could have sent a note to the high priest & said, "I think you need to have a little reformation there."

But we know what would have happened to that note. Jesus made his point. He made his point.

I hope you understand this is not against sacred places & sacred things. I believe, in fact I have to have sacred time. 11 o'clock on Sunday morning is sacred to me. When I used to go out fishing for two weeks at a time, the hardest part for me was 11 o'clock on Sunday. I could turn on all the radio preachers, but I wasn't in the house of God with Christian friends. It was empty. It was hard. That's a sacred time & a sacred place. This building is dedicated to the service of God & the praise of God. This table isn't just another table,

I could no more put food or set my coffee on that table than I could fly to the moon, I just couldn't do it.

Look at the cross hanging right back there. It was made this summer by the Sunday school children led by Miss Krista painted with the symbols of our faith & nailed together by Bill Timmons; maybe worth a couple of hundred dollars, maybe not, now forming a cross. When the time comes when we no longer need that for a cross, I couldn't take that wood and fix a dog house. I couldn't take that wood & split it up & say, "It's dry it'd make good kindling."

I couldn't do it.

Wood is wood is wood, table is table is table. Except it's not. There is something about us that requires a sacred time, a sacred place, some sacred things. Poor, poor, poor is the family that has no sacred time, no sacred place, no sacred things.

But Jesus' point is clear. That which is most sacred to God is human beings. We're created in God's image, created again in Christ Jesus, we are God's masterpiece. You want to see what's sacred look in the mirror. When God created you God said, "This is the best that I can do. I created all the other stuff, but this is like I am, this is my image."

You want to know what's sacred? Look at the person next to you. There is nothing in all creation closer, more mindful & remindful of God, than the person seated next to you. And if that gets lost because of the rigidity of system or institutions or churches or temple, then everything is lost.

The four gospel writers say that after Jesus had cleansed the temple, well, after Jesus had trashed the temple, he brought the poor & the crippled, & the blind, the sick, & Luke says, "and the children" to the temple, to be with him, & to hear his preaching.

And I think I know what Jesus said, "Isn't this a beautiful place? And isn't it wonderful that we're all welcome."

I think that's what he said. "We're all welcome." Amen.