

Lent 3 2024

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Exodus 20:1–21, Romans 7:12–25, John 2:13–22

I am determined to know nothing among you, but Christ Jesus and Him crucified in the name of the living God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are back at the temple today. Just about one month after I preached about the temple on Candlemas. Just about one month after Jesus presentation as an infant. The lectionary now provides for us to see him as an adult. And he is not a silent character this time, one over whom words and prophecies are spoken. He is the actor here and he is angry. But it behooves us to ask, what exactly is Jesus doing? The most common answer, at least in modern exegesis is that he's going after corrupt big business practices, the corruption of the temple hierarchy, and those selling in the temple. And there's probably some truth to this.

If you read the prophets such as Jeremiah, the priesthood was thought to be financially corrupt. There is some evidence that exorbitant fees in the temple were being funneled to those who were fighting the Romans. Selling the sacrificial animals may have been driving unfair bargains, the exchange rates on the money may have been harsh. But then again, if you've been to the airport, that's true even today.

The problem with that exegesis is that none of this activity is out of place in the temple, none of it. It needed to be there. Exodus 30 prescribes a sanctuary shekel for offerings, unique coinage. And if you've come from all over the diaspora to make your offering, you must go to the Casa de combo and change your money. And certainly, they made a profit doing it. Leviticus 1:3 details the various animals that need to be offered. And if you're sailing from Carthage, you're not going to bring your sheep with you. You're going to buy one at the temple. So we might surmise that although corruption no doubt existed, and it should be decried, it would not in and of itself be a reason to destroy the whole system? Not when the law itself was responsible for the creation of this system.

I ask again, what exactly is Jesus doing? Well, he's not just having a fit. Just like with the cursing of the fig tree, we can't just make the side comment: Well, Jesus is human; He was having a bad day; He'd gotten in a fight with Peter and man; he let him have it. As Nicholas Perrin, the president of Trinity International University reminds us surely when Jesus cleansed the temple, he had something in mind: something particular not occasional or random. What exactly was Jesus doing? The Church Father Origen, the biblical scholar and theologian from the early third century, goes so far as to say that the cleansing of the temple is the most significant Christological revelation in all of Scripture.

Now, let me put that in English, and you'll see what a statement that is. He says that in all the Scripture if you really want to understand Jesus as the Christ, the most significant story to look at is the cleansing of the temple. An odd assertion it may seem, but I want to suggest that Origen is correct. That what we see today is not primarily an attacking of shady business dealings. It's an eschatological epiphany. Again, English, it's a revelation of the way things are supposed to be a multi-layered picture of Christ's person and work. Because I mean, think about this act. Again, it can't just be a flash of temper, it's premeditated. Jesus walks in, not with a retinue of armed guards, not with the companies of people he put into groups when he fed the 5000. He wasn't forming an army to overthrow this place. No, he walks in and sees the tempo as he would have seen it every time he went all those years. And today, he does something different, no weapon at hand, he gathers up some chords, and starts making a whip. Again, that takes some time. There is premeditation. There is clarity of purpose.

He's making a whip to clear out all the sheep and oxen. Just angry. He had time to cool down. And he does it with a strange authority. So much so that it will lead people to wonder. I mean, he's not a priest. He's not a

member of the Jerusalem hierarchy. He's an itinerant preacher from the sticks of Galilee. It troubles them so much that in verse 18, we have to get beyond the biblical language, the biblical language, has the Jews say, what fine, can you show us? What they're really saying is who do you think you are? You see, Jesus is doing something unexpected. For a Jew showing up at the temple. He's running around doing all this stuff like he owns the place. That's because he is the place.

As verses 19 to 22 allude to today, the only temple that matters in Jerusalem, that day is the temple that is his body. blink and you'll miss it, but everything's changing. Christ is the fulfillment of what the temple has been. He is the temple. Christ is the fulfillment of the sacrificial system. He is the sacrifice. Christ is the fulfillment of the law. By his fulfilling of it, he has overcome the separation between God and man. He is the temple. He is the sacrifice. He is the priest. In Christ, we now see what a temple was always supposed to be. It's what temples are today, we see the place of atoning sacrifice that restores a broken fellowship between God and man. You remember how the story goes, don't you? Once upon a time, our fellowship was so unhindered that we would walk with God and the cool of the evening in the garden. And you know what happened, don't you? And ever since then, the story is consistently one of God reaching out. And man pushing away. Even Exodus 20 today. Lovely story, isn't it, we get the commandments. The commandments are good, but they're not the most interesting part of the story. To me today. Moses comes down with the commandments, commandments that God cared about so much. The rabbinic tradition says they are what God himself wrote with his finger. Moses added the rest. He comes down with this new and better way to live and that the Israelite people say, Yeah, that's great. Just don't let him get near us. We're very happy if you want to go up the map. out and into that darkness and fog and lightning and the trumpets. That's great Moses, but don't let him come near us.

That was the point all along, that he would come near us. Again and again God has sought out his people and his people have run to items, to strange practices, to foreign nations, to get away from the God who loves them. Why? Well confronted with the majesty of this God, who nonetheless loves us, most of us are more drawn to the pyrotechnics and our fear and nakedness bubbles up. It's like when Les walks into a dinner and realizes he's underdressed, he got the restaurant wrong, he got the dress code wrong. No one may care. It may be a room full of gracious people, but I cannot see that grace. I can only see my tennis shoes where dress shoes should be. From the time that Adam was crouching behind the leaves.

And God said where are you? Funny question that he knew exactly where he was followed by what have you done? He knew exactly what he did did. Ever since that time, we've been hiding in our nakedness in fear thinking somehow, we can get far away from God. Paul highlights the struggle today in our Romans lesson. It's familiar to you. I know the good that I want to do and I don't do it. And the things that I don't want to do, those are the very things I do and there is no health in me. What is someone going to do? Who feels that way they're going to cry out who can deliver me look around, see no one and hit for the bushes. Consider the temple the place that restores fellowship between God and man. Look at the architecture there are outside courtyards, one for the Gentiles, one for the Jews. There's an inner courtyard, there's a holy place behind the curtain, there's a Holy of Holies all this is built at God's request as a condensation to the fact consenting and love to us that we don't want to get to near God, layer upon layer upon layer. The Wizard of Oz said, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." When dealing with God, we say don't worry, I'd rather not. You stay there. I'll stay here. Look at the priesthood. It is nothing more than a continuation the sacrificial priesthood of the original Israelite desire to have someone else do it for us. You know, on Yom Kippur, when the high priest would go into the Holy of Holies, to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people, they tie a rope around his leg. They were worried that maybe he had committed some secret sin himself and God would have had to get him out of there somehow. And they sure weren't going in. Look at the sacrifice. Sacrifice is the point of the temple right to make the union between God and His people restored? Well, as Hebrews tells us, the problem with the blood of animals is that it has to be

repeated. It's ineffectual again and again. We slaughter the animals because their blood cannot atone perfectly, or completely.

He is the place. Consider the architecture of the new temple no longer designed to keep us at a safe distance. The new temple is the human body. Emmanuel God with us just like us. Notice I said a human body. It is not male primarily. It is not Jewish primarily. There's room for a boy from East Tennessee and a girl from Jos, Nigeria. In fact, if there was anything that seems to have annoyed Jesus with most of the selling practices is the expansion of the business. Archaeological studies have shown that over time, the need for the money changers and the need for the animals had caused an expansion into the court of the Gentiles. There was no room for the alien, the stranger, the sojourner, to come as close as they could, to the action.

What was the problem with that? Listen to Isaiah 56:6--8. As for foreigners, who become followers of the Lord who loved the name of the Lord and want to be His servants, I will bring them to my holy mountain, I will make them happy in the temple where the nations may pray. The Sovereign LORD says this and says, to those who are the dispersed of Israel, I will still gather them up. The temple is the place where all humanity can finally come home to God. Only now there's not so much room for you and me, in the court of the Gentiles. But in the human body, the new temple of Jesus, we are all found, because he has found like us.

We have a priest now who chose to be priest like us, and for us, tempted as every way in every way as we are yet without sin, able to sympathize with our weakness. Consider the sacrifice, the market difference in the sacrifice. Let me just read it to you. This is Hebrews 10:5-14: "So when he Jesus came into the world, he said, sacrifice sacrifice and offering you did not desire listen to this, but a body, you prepared for me. Whole burnt offering and sin offerings you took no delight in. Then I said, Here I am, I have come it is written of Me in the scroll of the book, to do your will, oh God." The author makes it plain for us.

When he says above sacrificing offerings and whole burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire these which are offered according to the law. Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to court come to do Your will listen carefully, friends, he does away with the first in order to establish the second by His Will we have been made holy through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Every priest stands day after day serving and offering the same sacrifices again and again, sacrifices that can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, he sat down at the right hand of God, where he is now waiting until his enemies are made a footstool for his feet, For by one offering He has perfected for all time.

Those who are being made holy, that you and me that you and me a temple with a human body for architecture, a priest who no longer is a part to do the work we are not willing to do but who became us to do the work he could only do a sacrifice that is effectual. And once for all. If you paid any attention to my preaching since I came here, much less this sermon, you might come away with the assumption that I believe that Jesus is not just the answer to everything. But that Theologically speaking He is everything.

Let me clear up that assumption for you. It's not an assumption. That's what I believe. You see, there are two ways to live this life. Give you some Latin The first one is called in carvaka: it literally means being enabled. Hey for being so turned over, looking inward at ourselves that we can see a belly button in curveball to say curve down on ourselves alive turned inward towards ourselves. The other way to live is quorum Dale. A life lived, not facing inward but facing outward, so that we might see the presence of God. Let me tell you the problem of my life. Right now. snapshot of my life right now. Man, I'm worn out and I'm scared.

Kate's getting ready to go back to work. I don't know what I'm gonna do with the boy.

Do I put him in daycare? Do I stay home? I mean, this isn't a abstract notion in the Martin household. Were really unsure of what to do. And this isn't like a goldfish. I say I can't put food in the bowl and come back a few hours later. What do I do? What do we do? And that's on the end of 18 months where I've been working four jobs driving 40 miles a day. And trying to keep my head above water as a new father. Who's afraid he's gonna bear break the boy dealing with a wife who's 5000 miles from home. I remember what that's like. Nothing familiar. No one familiar. And so I'm worn out and I'm scared. That's my life right now. You see the problem with what I just said? In carvaka, if I say when I asked to describe my life, I almost always talk about myself. I never talked about God. It's the problem of live too isn't that it's the tendency toward in carvaka. We're either excited with how we're doing about our discipleship. Have you noticed my phylacteries? How long they are?

Or more likely, full of nakedness, failure and shame. Hiding from the presence of God in the bushes.

Christ is everything. Acts 17:28 says in Him, we live and move and have you ever been in him? I need to get my head out of my belly button. Jesus says these strange words this Christ who is everything. He says zeal for your house will consume me. They remember that. And then about four short weeks the church will again stand on the mountain of Golgotha at the foot of the cross as he is consumed, a living sacrifice for you for me. For all of us, who when lifted up draws the whole world male and female Jew and Gentile sinners all to himself. Zeal for your house will consume me. His zeal to be the temple, the priest. The sacrifice means that today he dwells here among us, in fellowship with us what he wanted all along, to be consumed by our hearing, and by our eating, that we might dwell with Him in Him in His manifest presence. That's exactly what Jesus was doing. When He cleansed the temple. It's what he is doing and what he ever shall be doing world without end. Amen