

TENDING THE TEMPLES

March 04, 2018

Doyle A. Nyberg

Before we begin with today's message a reminder of the advantage of having a substitute bringing the message:

1. There will be no homework assigned today.
2. There will be no pop quiz on the material reviewed today.
3. The message will be short. Perhaps that is the most significant reminder of the day.

Today's focus scripture comes from the Gospel of John and as you've just heard, details Jesus' indignant and forceful cleansing of the temple. Is this the normal vision of Jesus that comes to your mind? He has a whip of braided cords in hand, overturning tables, chasing animals and people from the temple site. Just who is tending the temples? Do you feel comfortable with this version of the Man of Nazareth; the Son of God? Ponder that for a few moments.

Thus we are gathered today, this third Sunday of Lent. We are approximately half way through the Lenten season. The forty days between Ash Wednesday and Easter [excluding Sundays]. Last week, Pastor Rebecca took a step aside from the gospel texts and Jesus' ministry and revisited the story of Noah, the ark, the animals, the flood, and God's covenant as symbolized by the rainbow in the sky.

The lectionary choices for today had an overarching theme of "Beautiful Law". The message possibilities included Exodus 20, 1-17 (the Ten Commandments), Psalm 19 (stars in the sky), 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25 (message of the cross), and John 2: 13-22 (cleansing of the temple). Each of these readings has been incorporated in today's service in a short, but meaningful manner.

Today we renew our journey with Jesus through his ministry as we continue to the Easter Celebration.

Now let's consider once again the scene that Jesus encountered when he entered the temple at which he took such apparent exception. Imagine if you were there. What would your reaction to his action[s] have been?

You are preparing to celebrate the Passover Festival. You are performing the traditional rites of sacrifice as part of that celebration. Who is this man, to impose his will on the traditions of worship in the temple? By what right does he order others to leave, to scatter the animals, to toss over tables, to defy the rules and orders of the authorities? Does he not know that by performing these acts, he will defy the high priests and invoke the wrath of the Roman government? Does he not care that he is violating God's laws? And what of this statement "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again". [vs. 19]. Such audacity, such lunacy.

This is a lot to consider no doubt. And while some of those in the temple cower, scatter, and question; others are in awe and appreciation of these actions.

According to biblical scholars, the temple and worship itself have been corrupted by the chief priest who lacks true authority and is beholden to the Roman officials who appointed him. Temple priests are resented due to their inherited status and their connection to Roman authorities. And those Romans, it is they who benefit from the costs charged for the animals which are sacrificed. They truly control the temple. Jesus' intentions were to provoke a confrontation.

[All of] The gospels were written after the devastating loss of the temple in the Jewish war against Rome. These narratives reinterpret the loss in terms of victory. According to John, Jesus asserts that he himself is the temple (verses 19-21). Rome did not destroy Jesus by crucifying him; the temple endures through Jesus Christ. Though Jesus' confrontation against the moneychangers occurs toward the beginning of the gospel of John, it foreshadows Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection.

Marilyn Salmon commentary, Working Preacher.

What is your reaction?

Again, as previously stated, the gospel of John differs from the other three gospels in that the cleansing of the temple is placed at the start of Jesus' ministry and is written as a more forceful encounter. This trip to Jerusalem is the first of three whereas the other gospels do not take note on one. Do we need to get hung up on "the where" or even "the when"?

The writer explains the basis of Jesus' statement of the rebuilding of the temple at the close of the scripture lesson. Let's hear again the closing two verses:

But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that

he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said. [vs. 21-22]

Back in the day, the temple was in the forefront of the worship experience. Today, we are more familiar with the use of the term of sanctuary as a site of our worship experience. What are the differences?

Webster's Compact dictionary defines the terms as follows:

Temple [n] 1. A building for the worship of God or gods; 2. A large building for some special purpose, 3. The flat surface beside the forehead in front of each ear, 4. One sidepiece of a pair of glasses.

Sanctuary [n] 1. A holy place; specif. a church, temple, etc. 2. A place of refuge or protection, 3. Refuge, protection.

Indeed the temple held special meaning to those practicing their faith. It had since the time of the Old Testament. Temples had been built, destroyed, and rebuilt. But somehow the true purpose of the temple had been lost. It had been corrupted by those charged

with holding the sacred trust of the faithful in covenant with God.

While preparing for today's service, I struggled with what to share from the commentaries and what to highlight in the scripture reading. Earlier I asked you for your reaction to Jesus' action and if this version of Jesus troubled you. It did me for a while until I remembered to focus not on the when, where, what, of Jesus' actions. Rather to focus on the significance of the why. Why does Jesus take the actions He did?

Indeed He knows full well what the fall-out from these actions will be. He is fully aware of the eventual outcome of His ministry on earth. The why- - Jesus was demonstrating to those closest to Him as well as those He encountered, that a new way of worship, a new law of God- -was the true outcome of His ministry. He, by his birth, death, and resurrection was establishing a new and more profound connection and worship experience with God than had ever existed. And a beautiful law and worship experience it was to prove to be and continue to be.

As part of today's message, I encourage you to consider your own worship experience[s]. Does that experience, whether it occurs within the walls of this church or elsewhere, blur the lines of true worship as intended and prophesied by Jesus, or is there a pure connection with God as you worship? Are you tending the temples in your life- - physical and spiritual?

As we worship, today and in the future; may we tend the temples as Jesus intended. Amen.