

## Third Sunday in Lent – March 4, 2018

### Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

*Pastor Charles Heup*

#### **John 2:13-22** (NIV)

*When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (14) In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. (15) So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (16) To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" (17) His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." (18) The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" (19) Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." (20) They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" (21) But the temple he had spoken of was his body. (22) After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*

Friends in Christ:

Family businesses are a thriving entity in our country. Family firms comprise 80 to 90 percent of all business enterprises in North America. Family businesses account for 64 percent of U.S. gross domestic product, generate 62 percent of the country's employment, and account for 78 percent of all new job creation.<sup>1</sup> Of course things don't always go smoothly in the family business as this little joke points out: The owner of a business calls his son into the office, puts on a hat labeled "Boss" and says: "You're fired." Then he takes off the hat, puts on another labeled "Dad" and says, "Son, your mother and I heard you lost your job today. Let us know if there's anything we can do to help."

Already as 12-year-old child in the temple, Jesus understood that he had been sent into this world by his heavenly Father to be about his father's business. Repeatedly in the Scriptures, we hear the Father speaking to or about his son expressing his pleasure with his Son and his efforts to accomplish the Father's business objectives. The Son was all about rescuing sinners from the condemnation they deserved because of their sin. That was the reason for his coming into the flesh. That was the message of his ministry. That is what he accomplished by his perfect life and his innocent suffering, death and resurrection which is the focus of the Lenten and Easter seasons of the Church year.

As we consider the Gospel for today, we see that

Jesus was about his father's business.

1. Cleansing his house
2. Warning his opponents
3. Giving hope to his church

The Gospels record three separate accounts of Jesus attending the Passover celebration in Jerusalem – once when he was 12, once at the end of his ministry and once near the beginning of his public ministry. The incident in our text takes place at the beginning of his ministry when Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover.

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<sup>1</sup> Astrachan, J.H. and Shanker, M.C. (2003), *Family Businesses' Contribution to the U.S. Economy: A Closer Look*. (<http://coles.kennesaw.edu/centers/cox-family-enterprise/cox-family-documents/FB-in-US-2003.pdf>). Retrieved from <http://www.familybusinesscenter.com/resources/family-business-facts/> on 3-1-18

## **When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

Before we see Jesus in action about his Father's business at this Passover celebration, it would be helpful to review the background of this celebration. The Passover commemorated the Lord's rescue of his people from their slavery in Egypt when he sent his angel to kill the first born in the households of the Egyptians. God's people were commanded to observe this Festival each year. Many of them would travel to Jerusalem to do this.

As they recalled the details of the first Passover, they were directed to the Lord's promise of a freedom from the slavery of sin and death. The death of the lamb they killed for the meal, the blood that was painted on the door posts that saved them from death, the deliverance from Egypt, the bitter herbs that recalled the suffering of the people, the meal of haste – all these elements pointed to the Savior and his work.

When Jesus went up to Jerusalem he headed to the temple. **In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.**

Because people would come from long distances it would not always be practical for them to bring along their own animals for sacrifice. There was a need for someone to provide the animals, to inspect their quality to be sure they met the requirements for a sacrificial offering, and to provide change for the temple taxes that were collected. The businesspersons that Jesus found in the temple courts were providing a needed service but they were not there to serve the Lord rather they were there to serve themselves and line their own pockets.

The money changing and sales of animals were carried on in the Court of the Gentiles – the first part of the temple grounds that those who had come to worship would enter. To put things into perspective a bit further this was the only area of the temple grounds that non-Jews could enter at the time of Jesus. We could compare it to our parking area. Now imagine what your reaction would be to the smell of so many animals gathered in one place, and the sound of the bickering between the buyers and sellers as they haggled over the cost of the animals and exchange rates coupled with an atmosphere of dishonesty. It's not the kind of atmosphere which would help you to focus your attention on things spiritual. Instead of lifting up their hearts and voices in songs of praise, the worshippers would be more inclined to hold their purses and their noses.

Our text for today reports Jesus reaction to this situation ... **he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. (16) To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" (17) His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."**

Perhaps the actions of Jesus strike us as out of character – after all he is the gentle Shepherd who loves his sheep so much that he gives his life for them. But as the Son of God Jesus demonstrated a righteous anger and wrath against those who had dared to abuse the Lord's temple.

Jesus understood that his Father's house had become a den of thieves and he went into action – cleansing the temple in an effort to restore a proper sense of dignity and reverence to the place where Gentiles could gather as they wished to worship the Lord. Amazingly, it appears that no one objected to Jesus actions – perhaps their consciences were pricked or perhaps it all happened so quickly that no one had time to react.

Given the fact that we have no livestock for sale in our parking lot and no moneychangers seated in the entry, we may be tempted to think that Jesus isn't speaking to us. But we would be wrong. He still goes about his Father's business, cleansing his Father's temple. He still demands that worship carried on in a place like this

be done decently and in order so that nothing might distract us from focusing on the Father's saving Word and work. Jesus has more in mind when he speaks of his Father's house. The Apostle Paul, **"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?" (1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV)**

God has made each of us his house, his temple by the faith he's given us in Jesus. What does Jesus find in our hearts that might be keeping us from worshiping our God as we should? Our hearts can be busy places, so filled with greed, so consumed with worry, so distracted by lust, and envy, and anger that though we are here in body today, we may not be worshiping our God at all. Jesus once said of his fellow Jews, **"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me"** (Matthew 15:8 NIV). Do we give him reasons to say the same of us? Are we merely going through the motions of worship, while our minds are preoccupied with the argument we had on the way over here, or with our plans for spring break, or with that project at work that must be completed this week? How it must anger Jesus to see that we so easily permit ourselves to be robbed of this time with our Father's life-giving Word and over such foolishness place our souls in the greatest eternal danger. You can almost feel his whip can't you? And as Jesus points at our hearts so crowded with love for pleasure and money that we leave him no room for him, you can hear him shout all over again: *"Get these out of here!"*

So how will we react to the Savior's warning? Will you challenge his right to say and do such things like the Jews in our text? They demanded: **"What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" (John 2:18)**. He had already given them a sign. They had all the evidence they needed. Jesus had single-handedly cleansed the temple. Furthermore, he had referred to it as his Father's house. He acted with the authority of God because that is who he was and is.

True to form, the Jews did not see Jesus actions as a fulfillment of the OT prophecies as Jesus disciples did. Instead of looking for answers in the Word they demanded a miraculous sign – even though from the time of Abraham on they had been taught to live by faith rather than by sight. Without a sign of God's power and love, these people would not accept Jesus' claims to be the Son of God – they refused to believe the Scriptures and they would also refuse to heed Jesus' warning and call to faith.

Jesus responded to their request with a sign about themselves and their unbelief. **Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."** *Keep destroying this temple*, Jesus said. That is what they were doing by turning the Lord's house of prayer into a market place and stock yard. But Jesus' words had a double meaning. His words were a prophecy that they would kill him and that he would rise again from the dead. Just as heartlessly as they had destroyed true worship in Israel, so they would destroy the temple of his body through crucifixion. When they had carried out that act, they would have the ultimate sign proving that Jesus was God's son – following his resurrection from the dead.

We have destroyed the temple of God with our sins -not the building in Jerusalem where God dwelled among the Jews, but the body of the Son of God, the very body in which God lived among us on earth. Our sins nailed that temple to the cross. We sent him to hell and then buried him in a tomb.

Sadly the Jews failed to understand what Jesus meant. Instead, they laughed at him, supposing he had in mind to rebuild the structure in which they were standing, a building that had taken 46 years to refurbish. Jesus' words became a stumbling block to so many who refused to call him Lord and Savior. Pray God that never happens to us, for I fear it could so easily.

The Jews didn't see their own guilt in Jesus words of condemnation. They did not understand or believe that Jesus was God the Son. [The Jews] **replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" (21) But the temple he had spoken of was his body.**

By speaking of his body and his resurrection, Jesus is doing the Father's business of proclaiming himself as our Savior from sin – offering us hope.

Jesus points to our sins today. In sinful pride, we can reject his authority to do that, or in sincere repentance we can humbly bring our sins before him and plead for his forgiveness-the forgiveness he died to win for us, the forgiveness assured to us by his resurrection from the dead. You see, as our substitute, Jesus was happy to spend his days on earth honoring God with a perfect life of worship, a life for which he now gives us all the credit. So great is his love for us, and greater still because, in love he was also willing to face our punishment in hell, a punishment that would have destroyed us forever, but not Jesus. Because he, our brother, is also our God he was able to destroy hell and death too, so that we might live with him forever.

Jesus has passed through death. He lives and goes about his Father's business, building his people's faith, your faith. He did this for his first disciples. As they studied the Scriptures, they found Jesus to be the fulfillment of all God's promises. Verse 17 says they saw Jesus' zeal for God's house and by it recognized him as the Messiah long promised in Scripture. Verses 21 and 22 tell us that after the Savior's resurrection those same disciples recalled his promise to rise and so worshiped him as their living Redeemer.

We will want to do the same for in Jesus, God fulfills all his promises to us. God promises us peace. Jesus grants it, saying, "Your sins are forgiven." God promises us life. Jesus guarantees it, saying, "Because I live you also will live." These and all the Savior's words have great faith-building power. That's why he wants us to come to him often in worship so that he may speak and so that it may be said of us as it was of his first disciples, "**Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken**" (*John 2:22 NIV*). God grant us all such a faith as this, always for Jesus' sake. Amen.