

Year B Third Sunday in Lent 2024 Some Will Get It John 2 vv13 to 22

Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover. They are there because they are devout and devoted Jews following the requirement that all Jews make their way to the Temple for this feast. It's important to recognize this because what we see Jesus do in the Temple may not seem very devout or devoted.

Jesus appears to go on a bit of a tirade – with a whip cracking in his hand, he drives out the sheep and the cattle and the money changers along with them. He overturns the tables those men had been sitting at and he yells at the people selling the doves to, “Get out!” “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace,” he shouts. The problem Jesus is addressing here is the corruption and greed that had developed in the Temple. There were animals kept in the Temple grounds for people to purchase for slaughter on the altars. For the people travelling large distances to the Temple, who didn’t want to bring sacrificial animals on the long trek, this was quite handy. But mostly, this was just a money maker for the Temple – don’t bother bringing your own animals with you because they won’t be good enough to sacrifice. You’re going to need to buy our animals. The Jewish leaders in the Temple also insisted that only Jewish coins be used to purchase the animals and only Jewish coins could be put on the offering plate. Since they lived in the Roman Empire, people used Roman money. They had to change foreign money into Jewish money and they were charged a fee for doing this. And, if all you had was a \$20 and you needed to change it to loonies and toonies, you were charged a fee for doing that too.

This money-making scheme was not supposed to be going on in the Temple and Jesus was angry about it. As with all money grabs, it mainly affects those who don’t have much money. But, it is not the only – or even the most important – thing going on today. One woman at the Monday evening Bible Study, noticed that Jesus *made* the whip of cords. And she wondered how long that would take. We don’t know how long but it brings up an important point. Jesus didn’t walk into the Temple, fly into a rage at what he saw, and react without thinking things through. He sat and braided a whip out of cords – likely spares brought in with the sheep and cattle. As he sat, crafting this tightly woven whip, he would have had the time to pray and reflect. Using the whip was not at all a hasty reaction. It was

purposeful, it was an intentional response to the situation. And it made a powerful statement.

Jesus creates an incredible uproar – driving out people and animals, yelling and cracking this whip. The hustling, bustling commotion and noise of the busy, crowded marketplace in the Temple screeches to a halt. Everyone turns and stares at Jesus of Nazareth. The Jewish leaders were furious. “What sign can you show us for doing this?” they demand. In other words, they are saying “You’d better have some proof that you have the authority you seem to think you do.” Every marketplace had an overseer and every overseer had a whip...but Jesus had taken on much more authority than simply acting as if he were the overseer. He had called the Temple his “Father’s house.” Everyone knows the Temple is God’s house.

Jesus was certainly behaving like the ancient prophets they’d read about. Prophets often used actions more than words to make their point – Isaiah walked around naked; Jeremiah hid his underwear in damp earth under a rock and then, a long time later, retrieved them to show everyone; Ezekiel laid on his left side for 390 days then rolled over and did the same on his right. All of these actions were commanded by God to make a point. Jesus had gone further though. He didn’t say, “God orders you to stop making his house a marketplace.” Jesus was doing the ordering. And Jesus calls God his Father. That sort of claim to that authority needs proof and the religious leaders ask for some.

Jesus’ proof doesn’t really seem to make much sense though. They want a sign and he starts telling them if they destroy this Temple he’ll raise it up again in just three days. Nobody had mentioned destroying the Temple. Jesus may have made a mess and temporarily shut down the business going on but, destroy the Temple? No. His words did not quite fit the moment but they fit *his* moment. All eyes were on him. Everyone was listening. This is what he was waiting for. The Jewish leaders challenged him and Jesus challenged them right back. He had come to the Temple with a message and he made sure his message was heard. “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.”

The leaders scoff and tell him he would never be able to rebuild the Temple in three days. They think he’s talking about stones when he is talking about flesh. John’s audience knew what he was really talking about and, because John lets us

in on it, we know what Jesus is really talking about. The challenge of the Jewish leaders for him to prove his authority, Jesus answers with the ultimate authority – the authority over life and death itself. “Go ahead, do your worst to me,” he says to the leaders. “Kill me. I won’t stay dead,” he says. “Destroy this temple and, in three days, I will raise it up.”

This is the all-important message Jesus proclaims today, making sure that every eye is on him, every ear is listening before he speaks those words. Such an important message deserves our attention too. When John wrote this Gospel story, that beautiful Temple of stone had been destroyed. A group of Jewish rebels had pushed hard against Roman rule and the Roman Empire had pushed back. The destruction of the Temple was devastating for the Jewish people. It was God’s house – the place where they went to be in God’s presence, the place where divine and human met. The people were traumatized and trying to make sense of God could have let this happen. John gives these people the hope that they need in Jesus’ words.

My body is where God is found, Jesus comforts them. My body is the place where divine and human meet. My body is where you can come to be with God. Jesus is the new “holy place.” The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, John writes to begin his Gospel story. God is with us. And because God defeated death on the cross, God is still with us, even closer than before.

Those traumatized readers and hearers of John’s Gospel, clinging to the hope they found there, are not the only ones who need to know Jesus’ message, they are not the only ones who wonder where God can be found. Perhaps you find God in the beauty of nature, in the singing of the birds and rustling of leaves. Perhaps you find God in the stillness of silence – alone in your kitchen while others sleep, or staring into the dancing flames of a crackling fire. God is found in many places. God is here – in the water of the font, in the bread and wine on the altar, in the songs that we sing, in the prayers that we say, in the breath that we breathe. God is here – with us and within us.

Jesus “is the holy place of God” John tells us today. “He was a human body, as inseparable from his body as you are from yours. And God was inseparable from him.

During the season of Lent, we follow the body of Jesus as he travels to Jerusalem, as his hands braid pieces of rope into a whip to herd cattle and sheep out of the temple, as his knees bend to the feet of the disciples to wash them. We watch him eat and drink with his friends, and we follow him to the garden, where the bodies of his disciples unsuccessfully fight off sleep while Jesus sweats through a prayer that he might not have to endure the torture in his immediate future. We see him beaten, crucified, taken down from the cross, and laid in a tomb. And in the stories of his resurrection, he is still a body — huggable, touchable, scarred, and eating with his disciples.

In all these events, the body of Jesus is the location of God, and the point of connection between divine and human life” (Mary Hinkle Shore, [workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org)). Destroy this temple and, in three days, I will raise it up. God is with you and God cannot be defeated even by death is the message of hope proclaimed.

The leaders turn away from Jesus in confusion and disgust. The murmur of the crowd gradually grows louder as people return to the business at hand, righting the overturned tables, bringing the sheep and the cattle back in. Life was returning to normal with the ring of Jesus’ words still hanging in the air, echoing in their thoughts, disregarded and forgotten by many. But some of them got it. After Jesus’ resurrection, the disciples remembered this day and believed the scripture and his words. Some of them got it, some of those leaders, some in that crowd...

For us, Jesus is still the location of God, the point of connection between the divine and our lives. God is found in many places but, importantly, God is found with us. His message that day of an undefeatable God who dwells among the people is our message of hope to proclaim – to proclaim in word and deed. Some will turn away from us in disgust. Life will seem to return to normal as our words and actions are still hanging in the air. But some will get it. Some of the leaders, some of the crowd...Some will remember and believe the scriptures and the words we have spoken. Some will get it.