

Cleaning House
John 2: 13-20

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Spring is here. I for one am geared towards cleaning house in the spring more so than fall housecleaning. We can definitely identify the scripture this week with cleaning house.

The time is Passover. Hundreds of thousands of Jews have converged on Jerusalem. It was like the Olympics. They came from many different countries.

For you who have forgotten what Passover represents, In the Old Testament, God required the Jews to celebrate the Passover as a way to remind how God had delivered them out of Egypt. You will remember that in the days of Moses God sent a series of plagues to convince Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go. But Pharaoh was stubborn. God had sent 9 plagues and still no response. A plague where the Nile River was turned to blood, Locusts, frogs, flies and other horrific plagues, but Pharaoh would still not let the people go. So now God sent the final plague. God sent a messenger to kill the firstborn son of each family in Egypt.

BUT as God always does, He also offered a way out for them. To preserve the life of their first born they would need to kill a sacrificial lamb and apply the blood of the lamb to the door post. When the messenger would see the blood then he would pass over the house and the child would be spared. When Pharaoh's first-born child died, he was finally convinced that God meant business, so he released the people.

On that day God told the Israelites that they must remember what God had done for them and they were to remember it in this way...they were to sacrifice/kill an innocent lamb and then enjoy the meal as a family. They were also told that (if possible) they were to go to Jerusalem to do this. So, this is why Jesus and His family were there.

All of that attention and the size of the crowd meant one thing. Money. The economic impact was huge. The merchants would clearly make a lot of money. And where was the best and biggest place to set up shop and make that money? The temple of course.

According to one preacher: the Jewish Temple - where this incident occurred - was a magnificent structure. It soared roughly fifteen stories above the Kidron Valley to the east. It was a huge facility, nearly 500 yards long and 400 yards wide. The outer court of the Temple was nearly the size of 48 College basketball courts.

The merchants came. They were selling everything, fruit, fabric, jewelry, animals, and everything else that people might buy from them.

When Jesus arrived at the temple, he saw immediately that it had basically been turned into a giant marketplace or a comparison for us would be a giant flea market with animals

To celebrate Passover everyone was required to bring or purchase a lamb. With people traveling hundreds of miles to get to Jerusalem, it was near to impossible to bring a lamb, a goat, doves, or other animal. It was a tough enough trip without having to bring an animal, animal feed, extra water and to just look after an animal.

And even if they decided to bring their own animals, they had to be perfect, no spot or blemish. And you were not the one who got to decide. The priest was the one who examined the animals and many of the animals brought

by visitors were turned down by the priest. After all, the priests were the ones making a profit so they rejected many of the animals as unfit to be a sacrifice which meant the people may have traveled hundreds of miles with an animal and then still have it rejected.

The only option they had was to purchase one from the priests. They had a monopoly going and anytime there is a monopoly, people will take advantage of someone. And they did. They charged higher prices for the animals and the people had no choice but to pay it. So, in the middle of the temple were those who sold the cattle, sheep, goats and doves and right next to them were the money changers.

Only shekels were accepted and so people from other countries had to go to the money changers who charged to change their money into shekels. They also took money from those who were just there to worship their Lord. They didn't care about the people or the purpose. It was all about the money and their concern for profit.

The temple was a hubbub of activity. People shopping and talking, money changers clanging money, animals making noise. So much activity in this place of worship. And there they were doing the business of the day, lying, cheating, stealing, and there they were when Jesus walked in.

This was not even the Jesus that most of us know or the picture we have of him. Jesus was a gentle man, meek and mild, a quiet person. This is the man who worked in a carpenter's shop with His Father Joseph. This is a man who is healthy and strong but immediately as he takes a look around and sees the greed and the stealing and money changing in the temple, He storms in and basically destroys the place.

He makes a whip out of some discarded cord and starts wailing on people. He tips over the tables of those people selling their wares, He tips over the money changing tables. Food, wares and money are scattering everywhere. He's using the whip to chase people out of the temple. His voice rings out loud through the temple yard ... "This is not a marketplace, this is God's house. This is a house of prayer.: So, Jesus cleans house and it's not easy. He was angrier than anybody had ever seen. It was a very painful situation to see Jesus lose his temple and chase people out of the temple.

Let's face it, there are times when we need the temple of the Holy Spirit cleansed. There are times when the church needs to be cleansed.

Jesus acted the way he did in the temple because he had great enthusiasm for God's house and because he had enthusiasm for lost souls. Jesus shook up the lives of those merchants because he loved them. He wanted them to know that their continued activity would land them in hell, not heaven. Ignoring the merchants' sinful activity for fear of hurting their feelings would not have been loving of Jesus.

Jesus was not particularly liked by the Priests. They saw him as a troublemaker. His followers saw him as their savior, their master, their teacher but the Priests were demanding of Him asking Jesus "who do you think you are?" Do something to prove yourself. And this was asked two more times of Jesus to give them a sign to prove who he was. And every time, Jesus would answer them, "An evil and adulterous generation looks for a sign."

This kind of behavior is happening in our lives today. Have you ever used bargaining power with Jesus? Have you ever prayed to him, that if he cures

someone of an illness or makes something happen for you, you promise you'll lead a holier life, or you'll do something special for Him? I'll go to church Lord, if you will just heal me. OR Lord if you will just get me out of trouble one more time, I'll live like I should OR Lord if you will just answer this one prayer. I'll do whatever you ask.

We need to think about Jesus' lesson to us. These people asked for a sign. Instead of a sign, Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and 3 days later I will raise it up." They were confused. They thought He was talking about the building they were standing in. Jesus was talking about Himself. His crucifixion. These very same Jews were going to be responsible for having Jesus crucified. And Jesus was telling them that even after they killed him, Guess what! I'll be back!!! I am coming back --- 3 days later. But they didn't get it. They didn't want to get it because they knew they were about to lose their authority.... their power. So, they chose not to believe.

Jesus has tried to teach us discipline. The disciples saw how Jesus reacted to the sins of the moneychangers in the temple. They saw sin for what it was. They saw it in the same way that Jesus did. They remembered what the Bible teaches about how far we have fallen short of God's holiness. We are reminded that God is often trying to get our attention.

Do you have the same enthusiasm as Jesus had for the Lord's house? It is easy to get distracted when you attend church. Our lives are so full and so busy, it's hard to shut everything out of your mind even for one hour. When you settle in your pew on Sunday, does your mind zero in on what God is saying or are you making mental notes about what you are having for lunch or work you need to do at home. During communion, are you pondering the miracle of the Lord's supper or are you pondering somebody's wardrobe choice? When you get home, are you negative about the service and complain about that day's sermon being too long, or the choice of music not to your liking?

The visitors at the Temple in our scripture today had an attitude of "What's in it for me?" and Jesus condemns them in our text. We can learn a lot today by listening to Jesus and determining what is really important in God's house. We need to Glorify God and gain a stronger hold on God's grace. We need to concentrate on the message from God's word and not complain about the presentation of the sermon and the music and the liturgy of the day.

God should show us his displeasure over our lack of faith. Instead, he gives us a sign of grace. In Holy Communion, for example, Jesus gives us his body and blood with the bread and wine for forgiveness and to assure us that we are his dearly loved children.

So, what is bothering you today? Is it a desire for money? Is it the need to be more important than others? That's what was happening in Jesus' day and look what it did to them. It made them blind to God's love and his concern for them.

Don't let the concerns of the world eat away at you. Perhaps God is trying to do something in your life today to get your attention. We need to listen and pay close attention as He tries to get our attention. Let Jesus' love consume you – his love for you, his love for God's house, and his love for lost souls. Amen and Amen.