

Nativity Lutheran Church
Palm Beach Gardens, FL
March 4, 2018

Third Sunday in Lent
Text: St. John 2:13-22
Theme: MISTAKEN IDENTITY!

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered what was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken."

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In Nomine Jesu

A little later in this book of the Bible, St. John the evangelist tells about a group of unbelievers who came to the disciple named Philip and said, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." I wonder what response any of us would have if someone approached us and said, "Show me ... tell me about ... Jesus." What words, what images would we call to mind.

Is he the *babe of Bethlehem*, laying peacefully in a manger of straw while an adoring Joseph and Mary gaze on their wonderful Son? Is he that *lad of 12*, astounding the learned teachers in the temple with his knowledge and wisdom of the prophets? Or maybe you'd recall the *mighty prophet* standing on a hill preaching to a multitude who are mesmerized by his words and saying, "No one ever spoke like this man!" Maybe it's the *miraculous Lord* who calms the angry sea or makes a blind man see. Or would it be the *crucified Christ*, suffering a horrible death on the cross while his accusers stand beneath jeering at him. Or maybe it's the *resurrected Lord* and the *ascended Christ* who comes to mind, and we know that he shall come again to judge the living and the dead. I wonder what it would be?

But, in response to that simple question, I'll bet that few if any of us would call to mind or offer the image of an angry Jesus who takes a whip in his hand and drives the money changers out of God's temple with the shout, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

Why not? Well, to tell you the truth, I think we suffer in our day from an image of a wimpy Jesus who is so meek and mild that he wouldn't even lift a finger to

correct an errant sinner. Remember the ethereal, almost unmanly paintings of Jesus we see displayed in some homes and religious book stores that show anything but the true nature of a rugged Christ who marched across the hills of Palestine, slept under the stars, and didn't hesitate to confront his adversaries. This prophet of Nazareth was a person of strength, character, and outstanding courage. That's the Lord Jesus in the temple whom we see today. The whip in his hand, the tables overturned, and the animals driven out!

And ... fitting for a Sunday in Lent that's not counted as one of Lent's 40 days but as a "break" for Easter remembrance ... the lesson is about the resurrection breaking into the world; about having no temple built with human hands or imperfect sacrifices or traditions to fall back on, or anything to draw false authenticity or legitimacy from. It's about not recognizing the Son of God, the real temple of God, and being so caught up in the dim reflections so as to miss the true light of Jesus, the Son of the Living God.

You see, the Gospel ... the Good News of God in Jesus Christ ... is about something new transforming something old, a flash of brilliance that replaces forever what was becoming so humdrum and lethargic. It's about light persistently shining in the darkness that had subsumed even the temple under its dark cover.

What we're looking at and for is something that CRACKS of light shining in the darkness, something that CRACKS of hope for rebuilding what is torn down. The task of God ... our task today ... is to crack the whip a little, to let it resound with the sounds of tearing down where tearing down is needed, and the sounds of rebuilding where rebuilding is needed.

The whip cracking in the temple was the piercing sound which cut to the root of the problem ... a case of mistaken identity. The darkness had been mistaken for the light.

CRACK! Overturned were the tables of coins and the buyers and sellers, signs that the Father's house of prayer had become a market place. The great temple, the light of the world, had become a case of mistaken identity. Under the cover of darkness it had become only a dim reflection of what St. John had called the light "which was coming into the world." And part of the world "that knew him not." Overturned were the tables, that the tables might be turned to make room for the true Light which no darkness could overcome.

CRACK! Driven out were the animal sacrifices, spreading dung and the smell of animal remains throughout the courtyard. Imperfect sacrifices, mistaken identity. Driven out were all imperfect sacrifices to make room for the One

Sacrifice for all, the Paschal Lamb to be slain for all. Jesus knew it. Jesus knew it had to be him.

CRACK! Overturned were all the traditions, dim reflections, mistaken identity, which had turned the Father's house of prayer into a market place. Overturned to make room for the new temple in which God would no longer be worshipped with imperfect sacrifices, but with the true worship in "spirit and truth."

Our problem? We, too, mistake dim reflections for the true light of the world. We go after the dim reflections which in the darkness look as if they're leading somewhere – the grand and glorious temples of our own buildings, the sacrifices – mere tokens that make people notice, all of which lead only to dead ends.

The whip cracking in the temple was the sound that pierced to the root of the light. Dare we overlook that we are – CRACK! – part of that cleansing in the new life of our baptisms? That the old temple defiled by the hands of Herods has been transformed into the new temple, the body of Christ, torn down and rebuilt in three days?

CRACK! The whip sounds in the forgiveness of sins.

CRACK! In the hope that the light of Christ will still shine no matter how dark the darkness seems to get.

CRACK! In the often tearful kind of trust and hope that the darkness will never overcome the light.

CRACK! That our Incarnate One – Jesus made flesh and blood -- is made incarnate again and again in the bread and the wine for our forgiveness, renewal, and life.

CRACK! That the most basic faith that good will overcome evil, rejoicing will overcome suffering, that the resurrection will overcome death is our new reality..

CRACK! That all of it is God's gift, God's new covenant with us. It's not my work or yours, my strength or yours. It's by God's grace.

The Lord is in the temple. The whip is in his hand. The tables overturned and the animals driven out. These are the elements of our text, all met in Jerusalem by bloodthirsty outrage and misunderstanding. All of these elements of a dark day in the temple, signs of a tearing-down day in the temple. As dark, I would imagine, as some of the tearing-down days that we experience when all that is sacred and holy seems to be coming down around our heads. As dark, I would

imagine, as these days of painful uncertainty in ongoing wars in the name of peace that rain death and terror both upon those attacked and those attacking.

Yet all the CRACKS! of promise and the breaking in of the new upon the old, the light upon the dark, the true upon the false are signs of the resurrection which has broken into our world, transforming it, remaking our temples made with human hands and hopes into the body of Christ, cleansed and purified and holy, truly a house of prayer for the Father.

In the Name of Jesus.

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria

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