

3rd Sunday in Lent
March 7, 2021

"Remembering the temple cleansing" (John 2:22)

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LSB 424

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s text for this third Sunday in Lent is from our Gospel reading John 2:22. I’ll include also the preceding five verses starting at verse 17.

Then His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.” 18 So the Jews answered and said to Him, “What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” 19 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” 21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

How is your memory these days? Maybe we don’t always remember what we had for dinner two nights ago or who won the Super Bowl last year or where I left my keys, phone or glasses.

Fortunately, phone makers these days have a nice little feature called, “Find my phone” on them. You press the button and the phone will make a chiming noise whether you had the volume turned on or off.

But, most fortunately for our souls, the Holy Spirit is always chiming our hearts with the word of God that we have heard and read at the most opportune times.

Jesus had just performed His first miracle at the wedding at Cana and the story ends with these words in verse 11 before our text. **“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”**

The disciples saw Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine and the Holy Spirit used this sign to give a strengthening of faith to them. Ding, ding, ding. The heart chimes were sounding.

Then after a brief stop at Capernaum the group went to Jerusalem for the Passover. Again, John alone includes the historical details of our text, the first cleansing of the temple, while the other Gospel writers include the 2nd cleansing during the Passover week immediately preceding His death.

Here at the beginning of Jesus ministry as well as at the end, there was house cleaning to do. For only where the Word of God brightly shines in it's purity of Law and Gospel can the Holy Spirit give and strengthen faith.

The message was not shining brightly at the temple. It was being obscured by the business of buying and selling sacrificial animals within the temple courts. That was the message that predominated in people's minds who went to the temple. The main activity of the church was all about money instead of faith building.

Jesus took action by overturning the money changer's tables and driving the business outside the temple using a whip. Righteous anger some would say. Yes, zeal for the Lord's house, the disciples remembered from Psalm 69.

**“Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up,
And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.” (Psalm 69:9)**

The Holy Spirit was chiming their hearts as they witnessed Jesus in action. Jesus did this out of love and honor for His Father and love for all people. For the message of sin and salvation through the Messiah must be heard!

In the second temple cleansing, Mark records these words said by Jesus, **“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’ ” (Mark 11:17)**

Jesus zeal, the fire of love burning in His heart, drove Him to the cross to give His life for all nations! Only by His death could sinners bring prayers to God that would be heard through the Mediator Jesus.

“15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us

therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

It is precisely the Psalm, Psalm 69, which the Holy Spirit brings the disciples to remember on this occasion of the first temple cleansing that describes the death of the High Priest, the sacrificial Lamb which obtained grace and mercy for all. For Psalm 69 is a Messianic Psalm and the zeal of the Messiah to give His life for all people would bring Him to say **“And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (Psalm 69:21).**

The Holy Spirit was helping the disciples recall the Word of God that pointed to Jesus as the Messiah. But there was still much more recalling that would take place of all that occurred at this temple cleansing.

I. Remembering to vengeance

But there were also those who recalled this day, not out of love for the Messiah guided by the Holy Spirit, but out of vengeance and hate for Jesus. As soon as the “Jews”, and this word represents the Jewish leadership of the Pharisees, saw what had happened, that their cash cow was being interrupted, they came to Jesus demanding an answer. **“What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?” (v.18)**

Jesus knew their hearts, of course, and would not only speak to them figuratively. **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (v.19)**

Ahh, what long memories these people would have. They would not forget what Jesus said to them on this day. No, it would fester in their hearts and build up more and more hate until they could use it against Him, so they thought. At Jesus trial, we hear these words in Matthew 26.

“Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward and said, ‘This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’ ” (Matthew 26:61)

And they spat on Him and beat Him and told Him **“Prophecy to us, Christ! Who is the one who struck You?” (Matthew 26:68)**

And so again, Jesus words were repeated to Him at the foot of the cross.

“39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, “You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.”

41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the [k]scribes and elders, said, 42 “He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. 43 He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God.’ ” (Matthew 27:39-43)

Long memories motivated by hate and vengeance indeed. The devil would have us be motivated by the same. When we are offended, is it not difficult to forgive and forget?

II. Remembering to salvation through Jesus’ death and resurrection
Only by the Holy Spirit’s power can we forgive others their trespasses as we have been forgiven ours. Only by the Holy Spirit’s bringing to our remembrance the great amount of sin that Jesus has forgiven me of, can I not see the speck in my brother’s eyes but daily give thanks that He has forgiven me of the log in my own.

So we heard in our introit, in Psalm 25, **“My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare.” (Psalm 25:15)**

It is the theme for this 3rd Sunday of Lent, Oculi, that our eyes of faith are ever on the mercy of God. For He has rescued us all from the net of sin that has trapped us for failing to keep His commandments perfectly. But the unblemished sacrificial Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, having kept the Law perfectly in our stead.

And this is what the Holy Spirit brings to our remembrance through faith as He did for the disciples when they recalled Jesus’ words after His resurrection. For the temple that was destroyed was not a temple of stone, but His body, sacrificed once and for all on the altar of the cross. And though it was killed, it was rebuilt in three days! Yes, the Holy Spirit ever brings to our remembrance the resurrection of Jesus!

“But He was speaking of the temple of His body. 22 Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.”

And what God rebuilds, is rebuilt eternally. Jesus has a long memory of His love and forgiveness to His sheep. He never forgets His mercy. So we also heard last week in Psalm 25.

**“Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.
7 Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.”(Psalm 25:6-7)**

So the thief on the cross pleaded for Jesus to remember His mercy when he said, **““Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:42-43)**

Yes, Jesus has a long memory of His everlasting love to all sinners. What was foolishness and weakness to the Pharisees, is glory to the believer by the power of the Holy Spirit. So our epistle from 1 Corinthians 1 tells us, **“But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— 31 that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)**

Again, how is your memory doing? Your spiritual memory that is? The Holy Spirit continually reminds of God’s promises of forgiveness and our resurrection to life to all who believe in Him.

Tiger Woods recently had an accident driving his SUV at a high speed. The car was destroyed but fortunately Tiger survived. He’s been asked what happened, but he can’t recall the accident or even driving that day. Our memories are short of the things that we don’t wish to remember. They’ve retrieved a black box from the vehicle which will tell exactly what the car and driver were doing before the crash.

God has a black box memory that is omniscient of all we’ve done in our lives. And yet, the blackness of our sin is overwritten by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God only remembers Jesus’ death and resurrection when He remembers us. We are united to Him through our baptism. And our Lord assures us in Hebrews 10, **“This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them,” 17 then He adds, “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” 18 Now where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin.” (Hebrews 10:16-18)**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)