

Jesus? Angry? (John 2:13-22)

Sermon preached on March 15, 2009, the Third Sunday of Lent, Year B

Lovely Jesus meek and mild is nowhere to be found in today's gospel reading. Instead we get a glimpse of an angry Jesus, even a violent Jesus. You might say that Jesus acted "in anger" when he drove out the animals and the moneychangers from the Temple. Thomas Troeger, a man who writes beautiful lyrics for present day hymns, says instead that Jesus acted "in God". "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

A little background – it seems that money changing and selling animals for sacrifice used to be done out on the Mount of Olives and that Caiaphas, the High Priest had moved it up into the Court of the Gentiles. Now I wonder why he would do this? What do you think? (Allow answers). Yes because he would have more control over the process and he would be in a much better position to exact a cut of the profits. It is also important to understand about the need for the moneychangers. At Passover Jews came from all over and had to change their foreign money into Temple money. To do this the moneychangers exacted a fee. Similar to what goes on today. If you travel in Europe you need to exchange American dollars for Euros. When I traveled to Costa Rica last year, I had to change American dollars into colones, (singular colon). There's a fee for making the exchange. Because the pilgrims coming to the temple at Passover had no choice but to pay the temple tax and to buy properly inspected animals for sacrifice, it would be easy for unscrupulous merchants to charge as much as they could squeeze out of these people.

All of these animals and all of this buying and selling made Jesus angry. The Temple represented God's presence on earth. It was a beautiful place of worship, a sacred space, a thin place where the people would gather for praise and thanksgiving, for confession and for the festivals by which the Jewish people remembered the covenant God made with them. Now as Jesus looked he saw instead a marketplace for lining the pockets of merchants and the temple leaders. It was against this abomination that he took action, even violent action making a whip out of ropes to drive out the animals and overturning the money tables. "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

The theme of the second part of today's passage changes from *anger* to *prediction*. The Jews asked Jesus for a sign. They were looking for a sign of the authority that gave him the right to clear the temple like he did.

Jesus gave them an answer they didn't expect. "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." Well that answer didn't make any sense to them at all. In fact it seemed absurd – almost blasphemous. They took his words literally. How could he rebuild the temple that took so many years to build in three days? There are a number of conversations like this in the gospel of John – when Jesus asks the woman at the well for water and says he will give her living water so she will never be thirsty again – and when Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born again.

People tended to take Jesus literally and by doing so they completely missed the point. In today's scripture Jesus tells the Jews who asked him for a sign that he could rebuild the temple in three days.

They take him literally and he explains to them that he is talking about the temple of his body not the temple in which they stood. We get the point now but nobody got the point then, not even his disciples, until after he was raised from the dead.

The temple in which Jesus drove out the animals and moneychangers no longer exists today. The Romans destroyed it in 70 AD. The only thing left of it is the temple mount, the place where the temple used to stand, and the exact location of the temple relative to the mount is still being disputed.

Certainly the Temple meant a lot to the Jews of Jesus time and to Jesus himself. But according to what Jesus said and, which we now understand from a post resurrection perspective, there is no further need for a temple. Jesus is our High Priest the once and for all sacrifice for our sins. I encourage you to go home and read the Letter to the Hebrews, which makes many references to Christ, as High Priest. Here is one of them, "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers (and sisters) in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people." The temple was the place of sacrifice for which now there is no further need.

What can we take away from this episode about Jesus causing such a ruckus in the Temple? Certainly on this Third Sunday of Lent as we approach Holy Week, it is good for us to do so fortified with the knowledge of the ultimate meaning behind everything that happened to Jesus when the forces of evil did their worst. At the moment of Jesus' death it is recorded that the veil at the entrance of the Holy of Holies was ripped in two from top to bottom. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies to make the atonement sacrifice to God for the people's sin. But now there is no need for a Holy of Holies; there is no further need for a temple as a location for God's presence on earth. We have direct access to God everywhere and at all times through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for us.

Another thing to take away from this passage is a consideration of Jesus' anger and appropriate Christian anger. There are two kinds of anger, 1. Anger that results in cruel and vengeful sinful acts and 2. Righteous anger, the anger that fights against injustice and oppression. There is a saying on a bumper sticker that reads, "If you are not appalled, you haven't been paying attention." We Christians are called to pay attention. We are called to be appalled and to act "in God" as a witness to God's kingdom on earth.

And finally, we could ask ourselves if we as Christians and as a congregation, give a authentic counter cultural witness to the world by the way we conduct ourselves and our church business. If we in any way tend to look and act just like the world around us, what message do we give? Jesus came and found the Temple turned into a marketplace. If Jesus came among us into this church, this congregation today, I'm sure he would find a lot of authentic Christian witness. He might also find some things that need to be driven out? What would those things be – fear perhaps, or self-righteousness, complacency, lack of willingness to take the next step toward greater involvement in the church's ministry and mission. If we allow ourselves to become self-satisfied and unwilling to consider these things then we will never be as passionate about our church as Jesus was about his beloved temple.

Let us pray.

Lord God, you sent us Jesus who was passionate about doing your will. We saw him angry today, with zeal for your house. Through your Holy Spirit give us zeal for your house, which is our own Christian lives, our congregational life as well as the life of your one church everywhere. Help us to get it – to get why you came and why we are here. Help us to pay attention and be appalled and to take action against injustice and oppression in all its manifestations. Amen.