

Third Sunday in Lent – John 2:13-22
Who is this man?

I believe that most of us love hearing this story because it depicts Jesus losing His temper. This is because anger is a very human quality and all of us can relate being in a situation that makes us seethe. This story seems to give us a little breathing room after so often hearing the phrase, “what would Jesus do?” That phrase calls us to perfection while today’s gospel makes Jesus very human in our eyes. Honestly, haven’t many of us, after going off the deep end or flying off the handle, refer to this gospel story and say, “Well, even Jesus got mad!” However, it really is difficult, even shocking, to imagine Jesus losing His temper and shouting at a crowd of people.

Because we really do not have a lot of background information we have the freedom to create a Jesus who looks and acts the way we think a savior should. In other words we give Jesus characteristics that make us feel comfortable. And that is okay. What are the wholesome qualities that we are comfortable with when we think or pray to Jesus? I am sure that we all see Him as good-looking, clean, and the eternal peacemaker. Perhaps we believe that since He was kind and compassionate He was probably quiet and soft-spoken as well.

But today we read John’s gospel which describes a Jesus that does not fit easily into our profile of a Messiah. Many of us may be uneasy with this image of

an angry and violent Jesus Christ. Here He stands in the temple making a whip of cords, screaming, driving out men and animals, overturning tables, and throwing coins at the money changers. This is quite a change from the mild mannered Good Shepherd that many of us know and love.

In the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke this particular story comes at the end of Jesus' ministry, **after** all His miracles, **after** all the stories of His love and kindness towards the poor and the outcast. This gives us an opportunity to form a picture of a kind and gentle man of God. However in John, this gospel story appears at the **beginning** of Jesus' ministry, preceded only by the story of the wedding at Cana. The gospel of John was written between one hundred and one hundred and fifty years after the crucifixion and these writers wanted to emphasize the reality that Jesus was not only human, **He was divine**. In John's gospel Jesus also helps the needy, but first He challenges anyone who would desecrate His Father's house.

The merchants Jesus encountered were men selling cattle, sheep, and doves to the pilgrims who needed these animals in order to make their obligatory sacrifices. The money changers were there because the people also needed to exchange their Roman currency into Jewish money in order to pay the temple tax in the coinage of the "sanctuary shekel". Why then did Jesus get so angry? We wonder what His motivation was because those conducting business in the temple were suppose to be doing honest transactions that were necessary for pilgrims to

fulfill their religious obligations. But the gospel continues with Jesus saying, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!!” Some biblical scholars have taken an educated guess and assume that Jesus was aware of fraud, exploitation, and the greed of the religious authorities who controlled the means of achieving ritual purity and therefore access to worshipping Yahweh. Others believe Jesus was against any and all commercial activity in the temple simply out of principle.

However, I wonder how the apostles slept that night. Did they toss and turn that night thinking about how they were going to proceed with this ministry? Did they say to Jesus the next day, “People are not going to like You! You made a lot of important people angry. And we were becoming so popular”. Jesus obviously did not care about His popularity; He cared about what was right.

What are the tables that Jesus would overturn today, and more importantly what would anger Him about our personal lives. What would Jesus say about our society and our values?

Okay I think that it has to be made very clear that when we blame and accuse our “society” for the lack of values today...we seem to forget that we are the ones who make up “society.” Society is not something out there that we have no control over. Society is right here in this place, in our houses, in our actions. The values in our society will not change until we change, until we become

responsible and accountable. Society is not this faceless entity that we can blame for everything that is wrong; society is the face we see in our mirror every day.

On a more personal note, we should never forget that each and every one of us **is** a temple of God. The bible tells us we were created in His image, but more important is the fact that God loves us and wants us to be in an intimate relationship with us. How can that bond evolve if superficial obstacles get in the way? This gospel story is really asking **us** to stop and take stock about what is important in **our own lives**. What does Christ find when He walks into our temple? The cleansing of the temple is a stark warning for us to be aware of what we think is important and what we are willing to do to achieve our goals. We should take a good hard look at what may be misplaced allegiances, religious presumptions, pathetic excuses, smug self-satisfaction, spiritual complacency, political idolatry, and economic greed.

And never, ever fall into the trap of thinking that change is impossible. Turn to God and ask Him to help you with whatever it is that needs the most attention in your life. Sometimes we are blind to the things that keep us from God, from being the person that we were created to be. With God's help we will be made aware of what is most needed to change and **we will** be given the strength to change it. One never knows how one small change in our thinking or our lifestyle can cause a domino effect that can alter our entire life for the good. We have to open our hearts to God; trust Jesus to come into our personal temples and get rid of anything that is

keeping us from developing a strong and personal relationship with our loving creator. Change is not impossible, but we must not kid ourselves and think that it will be easy. Giving up something we have become accustomed to whether it is a habit or an object is never easy to do, but in the long view the reward is always worth the effort.

We are in the middle of the Lenten season. This is the perfect time to stop and look at our lives carefully and honestly. This is a time when we should invite Our Lord into our temple, into our hearts to help us get rid of anything that is keeping us from making it a true house of worship; what is keeping us from being better people. There was a time when the focus of Lent was to give something up, to make some kind of sacrifice...but what I think is a better challenge is to add something to our daily lives that will help us focus on God, Jesus' sacrifice for us, and His glorious resurrection. This is what the Lenten season is all about. So make an effort to come to the Stations of the Cross on Friday afternoon or the Lenten meals on Wednesday nights. If neither one is possible please take time out and sit with God for a little while every day. Hear what God's spirit is saying to you during this season. You need to hear it and God deserves be heard.

Amen