

Third Sunday in Lent

March 3, 2024

QUESNEL

“March Madness: The Prophet-Driven Church” (John 2:13-22)

“O Jesus so sweet, O Jesus so Mild!
For sinners You became a child.
You came from heaven down to earth
In human flesh through human birth
“O Jesus so sweet, O Jesus so Mild!”

This lovely hymn, 546 in our hymnal ,

- is how we like to think of Jesus.
 - It was one of the hymns we sang in the Kontorei,
 - the 12-man choir at the Sem in Ft. Wayne
 - and it always elicited angelic glows
 - on the faces of many faces in the concerts
 - we sang around the country.
- That is how we usually picture our Saviour.
 - And in many respects,
 - That is true.
 - Our Good Shepherd is kind and gentle
 - with His sheep.
- But that image of Christ is not enough.
 - It does not give the full picture of Jesus
 - who is after all, fully human
 - and has a full range of human emotions.
- That is especially the case with our text today.
 - Today we see our Lord getting downright angry
 - or upright angry, I should say,
 - since it is a righteous anger that He displays.
- Today Jesus gets a case of “Righteous Madness”:
 - He marches right into the temple like He owns the joint,
 - and He is mad.
 - How come?
 - What is the problem?
 - What is it that makes Jesus so mad?
- And what does it have to do with the church in our day?

The problem was with the attitude

- of what was going on at the temple. -----
- At the temple in Jerusalem,
 - a lot of buying and selling going on,
 - a lot of money was changing hands:
- *“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover,*
 - *Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*
 - *In the temple courts He found men selling*
 - *cattle, sheep and doves,*
 - *and others sitting at tables*
 - *exchanging money.”*

Now to be fair, we should ask:

- What was so bad about that?
 - I mean,
 - if you look into this a little bit,
 - it may not seem so bad. Think about it.
- The temple in Jerusalem
 - was the one place where the Lord God
 - had commanded His people to come
 - to offer sacrifices for sin,
 - as well as other sacrifices,
 - for guilt, peace offerings, thank-offerings,
 - and so on.
- This was God’s approach
 - to tie His people’s forgiveness
 - to the promised Messiah,
 - and it is all recorded in the Book of Leviticus.
- The Lord had provided His way
 - for His people to get their sins forgiven.
 - Instead of requiring their very life for their misdeeds,
 - the people were to offer up burnt offerings
 - and the blood of bulls
 - and goats
 - and lambs.
- This was God in His mercy and grace
 - providing forgiveness,
 - and atonement for His people.
- For hundreds of years,
 - ever since there was a temple in Jerusalem,
 - that is where all those sacrifices were to take place: -----

- at the temple,
 - in Jerusalem.
 - Nowhere else was provided as a suitable place.

But here is the human side of the problem.

- The people before. During and after Jesus' time here on earth
 - had to come from long distances.
 - The Jewish people had been scattered far and wide
 - across the ancient world.
 - They had been dispersed to faraway lands.
- So it was impractical for them
 - to bring the sacrificial animals with them
 - on such a long trip.
- So a method was developed that when they got to Jerusalem,
 - they would buy sheep or goats or bulls or doves
 - from local suppliers,
 - right there in Jerusalem.
 - To them that made sense.
- So businesses were set up to handle that trade.
 - And in many cases the people coming to Jerusalem
 - were coming from lands with different currency,
 - so there would also be money exchanges set up
 - to deal with that.

These things in and of themselves,

- one would think,
 - would not make Jesus mad.
- They would be providing a service for people
 - coming from long distances.
 - But there were a couple of problems with this,
- First, the animal trade and money exchange
 - had apparently morphed way beyond that
 - and became a lucrative profit-making business
 - that overshadowed the real purpose of the temple.
- The forgiveness of sins got lost in the shuffle.
 - It even got pushed to the side.
 - Other interests,
 - self-interests,
 - took over.

- Even to the point that they set up shop in the temple courts,
 - a place strictly reserved
 - for the worship of the LORD.
 - Secondly, a sacrifice is supposed to be exactly that; Sacrificial.
 - It represented the sacrifice that God has to make
 - for our salvation
 - as well as the future sacrifice
 - that He would be placing on His Son
 - for our salvation.
 - It is worth our time to go back to the Genesis chapter 4.
 - *Now Abel was a keeper of sheep,*
 - *and Cain a worker of the ground.*
 - *In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD*
 - *an offering of the fruit of the ground,*
 - *and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock*
 - *and of their fat portions.*
 - *And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,*
 - *but for Cain and his offering*
 - *he had no regard.*
- Many have puzzled over the seeming arbitrary nature of God in this story.
 - Yet if one reads carefully,
 - it becomes clear that Cain brought an offering
 - of the fruit of the ground
 - whereas Abel brought the special portion of his flock,
 - the firstborn.
- There was nothing particularly sacrificial
 - about Cain's offering
 - other than the offering itself
 - as there was in Abel's offering.
 - The people from afar were offering a sacrifice
 - using Cain's approach
 - rather than that of Abel.
- This also has implications
 - for how we also are to give
 - of the first fruits
 - rather than the leftovers.

Both of these ways of thought, then, is what gets Jesus so mad:

- *“So He made a whip out of cords,*
 - *and drove all from the temple area,*

- *both sheep and cattle;*
 - *He scattered the coins of the money changers*
 - *and overturned their tables.*
- *To those who sold doves He said,*
 - *'Get these out of here!*
 - *How dare you turn my Father's house*
 - *into a market!'"*
- So here
 - where the profit motive was driving the profiteers,
 - a true prophet,
 - a prophet of God,
 - steps in
 - and drives them out.

Now it is great that nothing, like what was going on in the temple,

- can happen in the church today, right?
 - I mean, we're not buying and selling animals
 - or exchanging currency in the back of the narthex.
 - I am not referring to bake sales or yard sales or things like that.
- Those can be innocent
 - and helpful and acts
 - Christian service.
 - But there is a problem,
 - a big problem,
 - when anything overshadows
 - or pushes to the side the real purpose
 - of the church,
 - which is still the forgiveness of sins.
 - One denominational church in Revelstoke
 - indicated to the ministerial
 - that they raised over 50% of their yearly budget
 - with bakes sales, garage sales and the like
 - and they saw nothing wrong with that.
 - When that happens,
 - and it still does,
 - Jesus still gets mad.

There is a problem when other things

- other than the forgiveness of sins

- become the big thing in the church
 - the newest and greatest thing.
- Some religious merchants
 - sell entertaining worship
 - and peppy pop music.
- Some capitalize on their big smiles,
 - funny stories,
 - and pleasing personalities.
- Some market their advice
 - for being successful
 - or “purpose-driven.”
- Church-growth gurus peddle their techniques
 - for driving up numbers
 - not their faith.
- When these things happen at the expense of truth and substance,
 - when the gospel gets shoved to the side,
 - when the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ is no longer
 - the driving basis of our church
 - or even is seen as an impediment to growth
 - well, that is when Jesus gets mad.
- And all faithful people of God living yet today
 - should get mad, too.
 - We should like to drive those religious hucksters
 - out of God’s house.

We pray: God forbid that we fall for their tricks!

- Their appeal can be very subtle.
 - On the surface it can sound like a good thing,
 - and it seems an easy thing for a church
 - and its members to fall for it.
- Been there, done that.
 - I used to be attracted by some of this stuff.
 - Thank God for His forgiveness
 - and for helping me to see things better.
 - Beware, because it can happen
 - and has happened to many of us.
- What we are looking for in the church
 - may not be what God wants us to look for.
 - The answer, of course, is to repent
 - and receive God’s forgiveness,

- which He gives to us freely,
 - for Christ's sake.
- God, through His Holy Spirit,
 - helps us to rethink things
 - from the perspective of His Word,
 - so that the doctrine and practice of the church
 - remains faithful to His purposes.

The church back then,

- the temple in Jerusalem,
 - had gotten off track.
 - They had gotten away from God's purpose
 - of the forgiveness of sins.
- So Jesus goes and shakes things up,
 - like a prophet of God.
 - Yes, and more than a prophet.
- Jesus marches into the temple
 - and acts like He owns the place.
 - He even calls the temple "my Father's house."
 - Jesus is claiming a unique relationship to God,
 - one that gives Him the authority
 - to act in the way He does.

This attitude of authority

- catches the attention of the Jewish leaders.
 - They challenge Jesus' authority.
 - They demand a sign,
 - an outward display of divine power.
 - Jesus refuses.
- Their demand for a sign comes out of their unbelief.
 - Jesus tells them the only sign they are going to get from Him
 - is a sign of judgment:
 - "*Destroy this temple,*
 - *and I will raise it again in three days.*"

Jesus is challenging their mistaken understanding of His authority.

- Instead, He turns the tables
 - and is challenging the basis of their authority.
 - And woe, w-o-e!

- Jesus pronounces woe on that kind of unbelieving,
 - hard-hearted religious leader.
- For they will reject Him, the only Son of God.
 - They will kill Him, in fact.
 - And so judgment will fall on Jerusalem
 - and on the temple
 - their bread-and-butter money maker,
 - the base of their power.
 - And fall it did.
- Within a generation,
 - the Roman army would lay siege to Jerusalem
 - and destroy the temple in the year 70,
 - never to be rebuilt.
- The destruction of the temple
 - the physical temple in Jerusalem,
 - the building that served as a sign of God's presence
 - now instead, serves as a sign,
 - a permanent warning to those
 - that want to make the church in their own image
 - and for their own purposes
 - rejecting the authority of
 - God's Son sent from heaven.

?But is the physical temple,

- the one made of stones,
 - the temple Jesus is talking about?
 - The Jewish leaders thought He was talking
 - about the physical temple,
 - the grand stone structure that Herod the Great
 - had started in an ambitious renovation
 - and expansion project on some 46 years earlier.
- ?How in the world
 - was Jesus going to tear that down
 - and raise it back up in three days?
 - But in reality, the temple Jesus was talking about
 - was His own body.
 - *“Destroy this temple,*
 - *and I will raise it again in three days.”*
- This was not a challenge from Jesus
 - rather it was a statement.

- The presence of God
 - was changing from a stone building
 - that was placed in Jerusalem
 - to the person of Jesus
 - who was residing among them.
- “Yes, so-called leaders,
 - you will hate me and reject me and even kill me,
 - but you will not thwart God’s plan.”

God’s plan will be carried out.

- Again, it comes back to the forgiveness of sins.
 - For what all those bulls and goats and sheep
 - were pointing ahead to
 - is now going to be fulfilled in Christ.
 - He is *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*
- The Lamb of God
 - the final one,
 - the once-and-for-all sacrifice for all sin
 - for all people
 - for all time.
- He is the one who will put the physical temple out of business,
 - for He is the one
 - the temple was pointing ahead to.
- As Christ comes,
 - the old temple has lost its purpose
 - and is no longer needed.

“Destroy this temple,” Jesus says,

- namely, my body,
 - *“and I will raise it again in three days.”*
- Good Friday and Easter
 - those great and momentous days
 - we are preparing for here during Lent–
 - Good Friday and Easter
 - are when these words of Jesus will come to pass.
- *“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*
 - Christ’s death and resurrection:
 - will be a dreadful sign of judgment and woe

- for the unbelieving religious leaders
 - who had perverted God's purpose,
 - and even to those who follow that path today.
- But that same death and resurrection
 - for us who believe in Christ:
 - is a wonderful sign of forgiveness and everlasting life!
- If you need a sign,
 - a sign to show you Jesus' authority,
 - you already have it,
 - it is the sign of the cross.
- That is the sign
 - that Jesus has the authority to forgive your sins!
 - And the resurrection of Christ
 - is the sign that you who are baptized into Christ
 - that your body likewise
 - will be raised at the last day!

Like a prophet of God

- indeed, as the very Son of God,
 - zealous for His Father's house
 - Christ will continue to drive out unscrupulous merchants
 - from the temple,
 - so that the church will remain true to God's purpose.
- And that purpose,
 - is to give to you
 - and to all people
 - the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name.

AMEN

This sermon was prepared for the Divine Service at Trinity Lutheran Church, Quesnel, BC and was presented on, the 3rd of March, 2024, the day we celebrated the 3rd Sunday in Lent. If you have questions or comments please feel free to call or text Pastor Alan Visser at (250) 552-4685.