



## John 2:13-22

### Year B

This is a story about where God shows up in the world.

Sorry, fellow social justice junkies; I know we've been taught that this is a story about Jesus protesting the money changers' exploitation of the poor. We could maybe make that argument in the Synoptic Gospels, where our table-turning Jesus protests that his "house of prayer" has become a "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17, etc.). In John's Gospel, however, the focus is not on the Temple's economic system, but on the locus of worship itself.

The Jerusalem Temple was the holiest place for Jesus and his religious contemporaries. To use Mircea Eliade's iconic phrase, it was the *axis mundi*, the center of the world. The Temple was the place where heaven and earth meet, the one place on earth where God's presence was known to dwell. Faithful Jews made their yearly pilgrimage to the Temple to

worship God through sacrifice, and the merchants and the moneychangers were a necessary part of this ritual system.

Jesus turns this system on its head with a flip of the money changers' tables. "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up," he declares (v. 19). In an aside, John lets us in on the secret that even Jesus' disciples don't yet understand: "He was speaking of the temple of his body" (v. 21).

Jesus shows his disciples (and so John shows his readers) that the Temple is no longer the central earthly location of God's heavenly presence. John already told us how the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us. God's presence in the world can now be found in the body of Jesus Christ. He is the "thin place" where heaven and earth meet.

That's good news for Jesus' disciples and all who encounter this Word in his actual flesh. But it feels a bit less accessible for John's readers — and for us. The temple of Jesus' body has come and gone. Yes, we've been to Sunday school; we know Jesus lives in our hearts. But do we not also have access to the *axis mundi*? Is there no "thin place" where we, too, can experience God's presence in the world firsthand?

It's a trick question, of course. John's is the Gospel of realized eschatology. God comes to earth as a human body. And God stays on earth as a collective body, long after Jesus ascends to heaven.

Jesus is speaking *about* his body, but John is writing *to* the body of Christ — the church. After his death and resurrection, Jesus fulfilled his promise to send the Holy Spirit. And when her breath fills our lungs, we the church become Christ's body, the place where the fullness of God is pleased to dwell.

Generation after generation, we have shown ourselves to be an utterly flawed body, have no doubt. The sins of Christ's church through the centuries are myriad and breathtaking. It is nothing short of a scandal that

the fullness of God still chooses to dwell among us. But that is what we confess, isn't it?

Maybe that's why Jesus walks into this morning's Gospel lesson and picks up a whip. Maybe this Lent, he's got some more driving out to do.

Could it be that we are the ones that Jesus is driving out? "Enough with your navel-gazing!" Jesus cries, "Get outside these sanctuary walls! ..."

What do you think: Could it be that we are the ones that Jesus is driving out? "Enough with your navel-gazing!" Jesus cries, "Get outside these sanctuary walls! Are there hungry people in your city? Go and feed them! Are there homeless among you? Go find them a place to sleep. Is anyone hurting? Go to them and sit with them. Offer them the gospel of a hug or a cup of coffee. If you would be my hands and feet, you must surely use your own."

We who have heard this story so many times before risk making the same mistake as the Jerusalem Temple authorities: We think we know the "where" and the "how" of God's presence in the world. We are Christ's body – hands and feet, eyes and ears – the *axis mundi* in a broken and fearful world. To fulfill that mission, where should we be locating ourselves?

Literally and metaphorically, it's a good week for the tables to turn.

### **Questions for reflection**

1. Where does God show up most often in your life of faith? At church? In creation? When you're alone? With others?
2. If Jesus came into your sanctuary Sunday morning and started to drive your congregation out of the walls of the church, where do you think he would send you?