

## MARCH 3, 2024 – WHAT'S IN YOUR TEMPLE?

Speculate, well, maybe there were two cleansings of the temple.

And I suppose that's possible.

But I'm thinking it really probably gets back to John's motivations, namely, he seems to be pursuing theological confession over chronological precision.

But either way, today we're considering the cleansing of the temple, and regardless as to when it happened, or how many times it happened, what does it mean to us, and how can we apply this into our everyday living?

The cleansing of the temple.

Where to even start?

Well, let's start with the temple.

The temple was the foundational place of Judea. It was the center of Judaism.

And throughout history, there have been three temples. The first temple was constructed in 1000 BC, by King Solomon, that would be King David's son. And it was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586.

Now the second temple was rebuilt, and there seems to be some confusion as to when, some will say as early as 516, others put it as late as 350.

But one thing they can all agree on is this second temple was not nearly as impressive as the first one.

It was short and stocky, really more like a fort, and it did not live up to the grandeur of King Solomon's temple.

But then came King Herod, and even though Herod was a psychopathic killer, even bad people have good qualities. And one of Herod's good qualities was his affinity for architecture.

He loved to build things.

And King Herod became one of the great builders of the ancient world.

And he began to build the temple that we find Jesus standing in today, around 20 BC, took 46 years to build, only to be burned to the ground by the Romans in 70

AD. But at this point, it is truly one of the magnificent wonders of the ancient world, and a source of great pride for any practicing devout Jew of that day.

Now, the temple was built in concentric rings, and the further you got into the middle, the more exclusive those rings, or courts became.

So, the outside court, which would obviously be the largest court, was called the Gentile Court. And this is where they put the collection basket because you might not be important, but we will take your money.

Now, of course, they weren't baskets, they were large brass horns with a small opening on the top, dropping down to a wider horn on the bottom, so as you dropped in coins, they made a rattling sound as they went down, the more coins, the louder the rattle. This was all by design. I think there were 12 brass horns situated throughout the Gentile Court.

Like I said, anybody could go there.

And this is where Jesus would often teach, and this is where our gospel takes place today.

Now, the next court in from the Gentile Court is reserved for only **observant** Jews. And then the next court inside of that, only Jewish men, and then the next court inside of that only for clergy.

And the next court inside of that, only for clergy on duty. And then finally the center, the Holy of Holies. This is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and this is where God lived. It took almost a year and a half just to build the Holy of Holies, a massive room divided by a huge thick curtain, 20 feet high, eight inches thick, and nobody by the High Priest could enter the Holy of

Holies, and he did it only one time a year, on the Day of Atonement, also known as Yom Kippur. So, when the High Priest would go in, they would tie a rope around his waist, so just in case he died at the sight of God, they could drag him out, because of course, remember, nobody can go in there but the High Priest.

So, like I said, the temple was the center of Judaism, and all festivals and feasts were held at the temple, and every righteous Jew was required to make a journey once a year to the temple.

But if you're truly devout, you could go as many as 12 times a year. Part of temple worship sacrifice included animal sacrifice. You can read all about it in Leviticus, every practicing Jew was required to make a sacrifice of an animal to atone for their sins before God at the temple, and this required either a male bull or a sheep, or a goat to be burnt.

But if you were poor, couldn't afford that, two doves would suffice.

Now, the biggest Jewish feast was, and continues to be today, Passover.

So, when Passover rolled around, everybody came, everybody was in town, every hotel was full, every closet was occupied. And the holy city was packed to the gills with tent cities appearing in the countryside surrounding the city.

And this is when Jesus enters into the temple and loses his mind. Why?

Well, you know, I'm reminded of an old fable that I think might capture the mood of what Jesus was feeling.

Once upon a time, the water of life wished to make itself known, so it bubbled up as an artesian well, and flowed without effort or limit. And people from all over would come to drink the magic water. They were nourished by it, they were healed by it, they were refreshed by it, but mankind was not content to

leave things in its pure state.

So gradually they started to charge admission to the well. And in time, hotels and restaurants began to spring up around the well to serve visitors.

And in time, laws were drawn up as to who could go to the well, and when they could come. And then in time they built a fence around the well, and put locks on the gate, and the well became the property of the powerful, and the elite.

And the water became angry and offended, and stopped flowing and began to bubble up in another place. But the people who owned the property of that first well were so engrossed in their power systems and ownership that they didn't even notice that the water had vanished. And they continued to sell tickets to non-existent water. And almost nobody even noticed that the true power was gone. But a few did. And with great courage those few saw it out and found the new artesian well.

But then again, in time that well also came under the control of the rich and powerful, and the whole process started again.

My friends, this has been going on since the dawn of time, and I believe that that is what is upsetting Jesus so much today as he walks into the temple, a temple that very much like that artesian well had been taken over and controlled by the rich and powerful.

Today we're talking about the cleansing of the temple, and I want you to try to put yourself into the scene. Imagine you are coming into the temple, you've never been there before, and let's just say for discussion's sake, that you are not a practicing Jew, but you are authentically seeking God. You have come to investigate, and as you enter into the Gentile Court, the place that can accommodate probably a thousand people, it's just rocking. I mean, I'm talking cows,

sheep, trinkets, souvenirs, popcorn, cotton candy, it's like a State Fair, people just milling all over the place, buying and selling all kinds of things. Now, in regards to commerce in the ancient world, never forget, this is an occupied land.

That means that Rome controls everything, including of course the economy.

So, everything is bought and sold with Roman currency, which as we've talked about before is principally the Denarius, or the Denari, which is a silver coin that has an image of Caesar on the front.

And then the inscription on the coin that says, "Tiberius Caesar, son of God," which as you might imagine would be a bit of a problem for the Jews, especially when it came to the temple. So, as a result, this blasphemous Denari was banned from the temple grounds. You couldn't even have it in your pocket, which presented a problem. How are all these pilgrims that are coming from all over, going to spend their money?

A-ha, this is where the money changes come in. They're situated right outside the Gentile Court. **First** thing as you came in, you could give them your unholy blasphemous denarii, and they would exchange it for their holy temple shekel, of course, with a considerable markup. And that money went into the pockets of the Pharisees that are running the temple, with a kickback to well-placed friends back in Rome. It's all a well-oiled machine, much like that artesian well, it had been **hijacked**, and controlled by the rich and powerful.

And this is what makes Jesus so angry. His disciples recall the words of scripture, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

That is the 69th Psalm where we read, "I'm a foreigner to

my own family, a stranger to my mother's children, for

zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of

those that fall on you, fall on me."

The root Hebrew word here is zeal, for zeal. And that describes boiling liquid, like molten metal. Applied to a person, this would mean somebody that is really, really burning with anger.

Consumed, literally devoured with anger, and that is where we find Jesus.

And what is devoured by?

Well, according to the 69th Psalm, he's devoured by the insult to his Father. Why? Because the temple had become a place of business. And as I said, very much like the artisan well was being manipulated by the rich and powerful, who are putting up barriers to keep people who are seeking God out. And this made Jesus furious.

I imagine it continues to upset him today. But if I was there, I would find this very confusing. I mean, think about.

Imagine you're there, okay, and you're just selling doves. You're trying to make a living. And then all of a sudden, this crazy Nazarene shows up, starts throwing chairs around, and throwing everybody out.

I mean, I imagine you'd be thinking, hey, I don't get it. We are performing a service here.

Everyone knows you can't bring a denarius in here; you have to have a shekel.

How are people going to pay the temple tax if they can't exchange coins?

We got coins coming in from Egypt, we got coins coming in from Rome and from Greece. And I know everybody thinks we're greedy, but we're just trying to make a living. And yeah, I understand it's a bit of a markup here, but we are providing a service. It's hard to travel with animals.

Without us, you'd have to make all these different accommodations for yourself, so I don't understand the problem, I don't get it.

By whose authority does he do these things? Does he really think he's speaking

for God? This is the way we've always done it. So, they confront Jesus, "Who do you think you are? By what authority do you do these things? What **sign** can you show us for doing this?" Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Oh, well, okay, now they know he is crazy. I mean, this temple took 46 years to build, he is going to raise it up in three days. But remember, we're in the gospel of John, and **John is highly symbolic in his writing**. And the temple that John's talking about here is the temple of the body of Jesus that he would of course raise in three days.

But, you know, the disciples don't understand this, and I doubt if I was there, I would've either. But they would in time, in fact, they recall these words as prophetic, but at the time I'm sure it was very confusing. So, what have we learned from this gospel?

First of all, we've learned that Jesus got very angry, because the temple, his Father's house had become a den of thieves with false teachers, and the love of money literally taking over the house of God, sadly, this continues to this day, false prophets asking for money. Send me your love offering, and I'll give you a blessing. I remember watching a TV evangelist interview not that long ago, making a case for why he needed a second private jet. And he looked at the interviewer and he said, "Well, if Jesus were here, he wouldn't be riding on a donkey." It's painful, really. So, there's that aspect, but there's also something else going on here that's much deeper.

My mind goes to a lonely well just outside of a Samaritan village called Sychar. And Jesus is talking with a woman, and the woman asks

him a question, and it's a good question. She says, "You people worship in the temple, we worship here on the mountain. Who's got it right? Where should I worship?" And Jesus replied, "Woman, the time is coming, in fact is now here where you will no longer worship in the temple, you'll no longer worship on this mountain, but you yourself will become the temple." Acts 17, "The God who made this world and all things in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands."

1 Corinthians, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwells in you?" I guess what I'm trying to say is that we in a very real sense are the body of Christ, and as the body of Christ, we are living temples. So, if we're the temple, let me ask you a question. If Jesus entered your temple today, would he have cause to be angry?

If he was to form a cord into a whip, what would he drive out first?

Are there money changer tables in your court, something that you value above anything else? Some habitual sin lying around in your stalls? What would he find? Remember, the sellers of the doves, the money changers, they saw themselves as good people, or at least good enough. This is the way we've always done it.

What about us? Do we live by that creed, good enough, as this is the way that we've always done it. Have we become comfortable with our own habitual sin? Because I can promise you this, my friend, when Jesus comes into our temple, he's not going to be comfortable with it.

Let us never forget that we do serve a God of love, that is true, but we also serve a God of judgment. But the good news about the good news is that if we confess our sins, he is faithful to forgive us.

This week, I invite you, consider your temple. Take a look around, what needs to be driven out. Are you ready for the Lord of Lords to abide in the holy of Holies that lies inside of you?

My friends, when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain that separated the Holy of Holies was ripped from top to bottom. So, I guess the question becomes, if the curtain of the Holy of Holies in your temple was ripped from top to bottom, what would it reveal?

What are we worshipping these days?

What do we truly cherish?

We are God's temple.

This week let us take a good look around our own temple and ask ourselves this.

if Jesus were to show up in our temple today, what would he find?

Let us be watchful.

Let us be mindful.

Let us be faithful.

You know not the hour your Lord is coming.

And the church said, AMEN

-Rev. Katie Dailey, in process

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**NB: Good Friday Noon** short prayer and praise for those who want to be observant. This prayer is 30-40 minutes. Maybe this will be your lunchtime experience or maybe after this SHORT prayer you will be taking off for an Easter trip.

After that short community prayer the building will remain opened for private prayer as soft music will be played and a video to help you meditate and pray. Good Friday is a time to remember all that Jesus did for each and every one of us. From 12:30 on just drop in for however long you may want.

If you want an evening experience Trinity Lutheran and First United Methodist will have a service at 7 PM.

**Maundy Thursday** will begin with a pot luck at 6:30 that will include Communion. We will be on Daylight Savings Time so it will be light when you leave. These are the holiest days of the entire church year. Make an effort to be observant.