

Sermon: Your body: God's temple  
3 Lent, Year B  
John 2:13-22

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March 4, 2018

Jesus must have heard my sermon of last week where I talked about rearranging the furniture. I'd say in today's passage from the Gospel of John, Jesus took my message a little too far! He is in the Temple not only rearranging furniture but overturning tables, scattering coins and using a whip to drive out the money changers!

When we think of our favorite Bible stories, does this one rise to the top of anyone's list? I didn't think so.

This story of Jesus wreaking havoc in the Temple is troublesome. Anybody out there want Jesus to calm down? To get under control? At first glance this story hardly reflects our notions of the Prince of Peace, our gentle Jesus, our loving Savior. This is more of a Rambo Jesus. So what might be going on here?

After Jesus rearranges the temple furniture so aggressively, the Jewish leaders confront him. They ask him by what authority can he interfere with the temple practices that allowed different people from all over who have come for Passover to exchange their coinage for the Temple coins to pay their temple tax and worship appropriately. And Jesus says, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days." As is usually the case in John's Gospel, Jesus says and means one thing and the people he encounters understand something else. The leaders reply, "It's taken forty-six years to build this temple and you are going to raise it in three days?" And John explains to the reader that the temple Jesus was talking about was his own body.

The temple was seen as the physical locus of God in the Jewish faith at the time of Jesus. It was seen as God's dwelling place. He is literally and figuratively shaking the foundations of the authority of the temple as he makes this claim of his being the new temple.

For Jesus to threaten the temple practices and systems that were in place would have been deeply offensive and threatening for many Jewish leaders. Jesus, as a faithful Jew, was not against Judaism but he was revealing how some institutional systems and practices had inhibited the ability of God's people to be open to new revelations about God.

So why does this passage occur during Lent? Traditionally Lent was a season when new converts to Christianity prepared for baptism at Easter. In baptism when we go under the water, we say that we have died, been buried with, with Christ, and when we come back up out of the water, we say we have risen with Christ. We are baptized into Christ's body. So what happens to Jesus, his death and resurrection, happens to us and in some sense we become one with him. As we often say at communion "may Christ dwell in us and we in him".

And mysteriously the temple of God is within us. In 1 Corinthians (6:19) "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God and that you are

not your own?" Your body is a temple of God! And you are not your own; you belong to God. The Holy Spirit dwells within you and me! We God's dwelling place. And while we are not Jesus, we are made in God's image.

Jesus wreaking havoc in the Temple presented both the challenge and threat that new life in Jesus brings. For us to live into our baptismal vows, for us to be faithful to our identity in Christ, to acknowledge that God dwells in us, means we will also be both challenged and our former ways of life even threatened at times; we will be constantly challenged to adjust to God's loving ways, and threatened by needing to give up our old, less loving, ways of being. If we are followers of Christ, we are called to acknowledge the temple of God within us.

The 16<sup>th</sup> c. Spanish mystic St. Teresa of Avila (1515–1582) offers us a perspective about the sacred nature of our bodies, the bodies through whom Jesus dwells.

*Christ has no body but yours,  
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,  
Yours are the eyes with which he looks  
Compassion on this world,  
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,  
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.*

Imagine if you, like Jesus, cared about God more than anything else in the world. Take a look at your hands, your feet. How will you bless the world with those hands? Where will those feet take you to do good? Consider your eyes. How will those eyes look compassion on this world? How will Jesus live in you?