

Lent 3B 07 March 2021
John 2:13-22
St Peter's Lutheran Church Elizabeth
Greg Bensted

Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. Let's pray:

The religious people didn't get what Jesus was referring to. They didn't understand that Jesus was talking about the temple of his body. They just went about business as usual. It was business as usual the day Jesus showed up at the temple. Animals were being bought and sold. Coins were being changed. All the usual people had their usual places and usual roles.

Now, we need to do a spring clean at this point. Throw a few things out. Things that don't belong, things that distract, before we can really understand what's happening. I want you to try to forget what you've previously thought about Jesus cleansing the temple. Try to hear it as though for the first time.

I don't think this story is simply about Jesus getting angry. Jesus got angry. I get angry. That's not the point. And I don't think it's about the animals or the moneychangers being in the temple. Jesus would have known they were there. He grew up as a faithful Jew going to the temple. He didn't show up, surprised there were animals and moneychangers there. The animals and moneychangers had always been there. That's how the system worked. It was business as usual.

I believe Jesus went to the temple that day for one purpose; to throw out and overturn business as usual. There are times when we need the tables of our life overturned and the animals thrown out because it's so easy to fall into the trap of business as usual.

- Have you ever lived on auto-pilot? You go through the motions. You show up but you're not really there. That's business as usual.
- Have you ever smiled that I'm-good-and-everything-is-fine smile but behind the smile there was an emptiness and your heart was breaking? That's carrying on with business as usual.
- Or maybe you wake up in the morning and you're as exhausted as you were when you went to bed the night before. Business as usual.
- Have you ever felt like you were just not yourself? Nothing seemed right? Boredom overcame creativity. There was no enthusiasm, wonder, or imagination. It was just business as usual.

These things, however, aren't the problem. They're the symptom in the same way that the animals and moneychangers in the temple aren't the problem. They're the symptoms of something deeper going on. The problem is not so much in the temple as it is in the human heart.

That deeper issue is foundational to business as usual. Sometimes it's about our fear. We're fearful about what's happening in our life or the uncertainty of the future and we want some type of security and predictability so we can keep on doing the same old things. Business as usual is predictable and steady but it creates only an illusion of security. Sometimes business as usual is a symptom of our grief and sorrow. Something has been lost. We can't get back the life we want so we cling to business as usual because it's familiar and we want some stability. Sometimes we're so busy and worn out making a living that life turns into one task after another, one appointment after another, an endless to-do list, and it's business as usual. Maybe we've taken people, relationships, and things for granted. Maybe we've lost our sense of gratitude, wonder, or mystery.

These aren't criticisms or judgements. I'm simply naming what often happens to us.

There're thousands of ways we fall into business as usual, but the one thing that lies at the centre of it all is, forgetfulness. We forget that we really are the temple of God's presence. We forget that all of creation is the residence of God. We forget that in whatever direction we might turn, there is the face of God gazing upon us. And as soon as we forget those things about ourselves, each other, or the world, life becomes business as usual.

I believe that's what Jesus is addressing in the temple. The people, like us, forget that they themselves are the true temple of God. It's all about the human built temple, the animals, and the coins. They've forgotten that God is more interested in them than in their festivals and he wants them more than their offerings.

When we forget that we are the temple of God, life can be reduced to a series of transactions. Relationships and intimacy are lost. Priorities get rearranged. Making a living replaces living a life. Life becomes a marketplace rather than a place for meeting the holy in ourselves and each other. It's business as usual.

That's what Jesus is overturning and driving out of the temple. In the gospel according to St John, this happens at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. The Word became flesh (John 1:14), water became wine (John 2:9), and now the temple is becoming human. And it doesn't stop there. Throughout the rest of the gospel, Jesus interrupts business as usual.

Remember the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-26)? She's had five husbands and she's living with a man who isn't her husband. Despite what we think, that's not a statement about her. It's another manifestation of business as usual. Her first husband died, divorced her, or ran off. Who knows? What we do know is that it was improper and dangerous to be a woman without a man. Business as usual meant she had to belong to a man. So, there was a second man, and a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth. Jesus meets this woman at the well and interrupts business as usual. It's not about the man or men in her life. It's about her. Jesus recognises her as the temple of God. Not a place on the Samaritan mountain. Nor in Jerusalem. Rather, the woman herself.

How about the man whom spent thirty-eight years on a mat (John 5:1-9)? He was paralysed and always trying to get into the pool of water that would heal him but someone always beat him to it. The same ground, the same mat, the same paralysed legs, the same failed effort. It was thirty-eight years of business as usual. Then Jesus comes along and says, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." And the man did. Jesus interrupted business as usual and the man rose up to a new life.

Then there's Lazarus (John 11:1-44). He's been dead four days already. Martha knows the stench of death is present. Jesus tells her it will no longer be business as usual. "Take away the stone," he says. Death won't have the final word. "Lazarus, come out!"

And let's not forget the five thousand people who show up empty and hungry (John 6:1-13). Philip says there's not enough. There's no way to feed them. Empty and hungry people are business as usual. But Jesus has other plans. Two fish and five loaves are more than enough. Everyone was satisfied and twelve baskets were filled with leftovers. It wasn't business as usual for the empty and hungry.

Over and over again Jesus is interrupting, disrupting, overturning, and throwing out business as usual. Business as usual is destructive of our lives and relationships. It destroys our ability to see and participate in the holy that is already present in and among us.

The Word became flesh so that the temple might become human. Jesus continues to overturn and throw out business as usual because the truth is, there are still Samaritan women waiting at the well in our world today. There are still lame people grounded by business as usual. Empty and hungry people are still a reality in our world and there are dead people waiting to be made alive.

Regardless of who we are, what we've done or left undone, or how we see or judge our life, we are the temple of God and Jesus stands in the temple of our life interrupting business as usual.

Jesus doesn't ask us to do things so that we can become holy or become the temple. He's already done that work on the cross. He wants us to remember that we already are the temple and claim what is already ours. Jesus doesn't make us into something we're not. He calls us back to who we've always been - the image and likeness of God, and the temple of his affection. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.