

Worship Service for March 7th: 3rd Sunday in Lent

- **Old Testament:** Exodus 20:1-17
- **New Testament:** John 2:13-22
- **Psalms:** Psalm 19

Announcements:

- Welcome to our worship service! We're glad you are reading. We pray that God's blessings and peace will be with you all now and forever! Amen.
- Bible study will resume on March 17th. Time: 7pm; Place: St. David's. We will be studying James 1.

Sermon: Zeal For God's House!

Interesting story to read in our passage this morning and knowing Jesus and how gentle, loving and kind he was, some people struggle to digest his actions in John 2. There is no example or illustration that one can give to help anyone understand this story because none of them will do justice to what took place in the Temple. However, when we consider the magnitude of the Temple, maybe just maybe we could begin to understand Jesus' reaction.

The Jerusalem Temple was like the heartbeat of Judaism even till date. This wasn't just an ordinary place of worship. It was the centre of worship and music, of politics and society, of national celebration and mourning. Above all, it was the place where the Israelites gathered to worship Yahweh, their God. It was God's dwelling place. It was the essence, the focal point of Israel's worship.

Why did Jesus do what he did and what was the meaning behind the answer he gave?

We are well informed that he showed up to Jerusalem when it was drawing near to the Passover which is a Jewish festival. During this festival, Israelites from all over the Mediterranean would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to Yahweh and also to pay their annual Temple tax. They had to sacrifice animals without blemish and birds, and it was impractical for people to travel hundreds of miles with animals. Therefore, those living in Jerusalem saw a business opportunity. Also, they could only pay their Temple taxes using currency that was used in Jerusalem, hence the money exchangers. Sadly, the merchants used this as an opportunity to exploit people, thereby inflating the cost of animals and the currency exchange rate. This had become an ongoing practice and was now accepted as the norm.

From these explanations, we can understand why Jesus was angry with the people. Not only were they not supposed to make their sales inside the Temple, they were also exploiting their fellow brothers and sisters. Jesus clearly regarded their actions as corrupt and under God's judgment. The whole marketplace atmosphere and corruption was contrary to what the Temple symbolized for everyone.

Jesus also used this as an opportunity to introduce to the people what he was going to experience. Remember that he had done so only with the disciples so far as we gathered from last week. Jesus spoke of his death and resurrection even though they didn't understand. Jesus was introducing a new order of things. He was going to be the new sacrificial lamb and replace the old sacrifice of animals. He was becoming the new Temple and the old Temple will lose its significance. And we are told that zeal for God's house had consumed Jesus Christ.

Two questions we should ask ourselves this morning is “do we have the right zeal for God's house, and can we become too zealous for God?”

Take the Israelites for example, this people had great awe of the Temple and were boasting to Jesus that it took forty-six years to build such a great building. Yet they could still disrespect the Temple so much. They desecrated the same Temple with their corrupt merchandise. They became more zealous for money than for worship, more zealous for marketing that for God's dwelling. More zealous for their own service than service for God. The Passover lost its significance because of their actions. They were in awe of a building and not of the God who caused them to assemble in that building.

What are we zealous for? Are we zealous for God's service or are we more zealous for the building? It is great to take good care of our church buildings and to sustain them. However, when we look around us in Canada and other countries of the world, we will notice that those great and magnificent buildings that we erected for the church, have very people. Why is that? Where are we placing our focus and what do we need to do to make things different?

When we lose sight of the focal point of the church, service to God and humanity will become a burden. It happened with the Ten Commandments. God made those as guidelines for our daily living reasons why Jesus summarized it into two commandments – loving God and loving others. Nevertheless, the Jewish leaders succeeded in turning it into a burden to the people by breaking them down to hundreds of smaller laws that made life unbearable to the Israelites.

What is the focal point of our church today? Is it the building or the people in it? The pandemic has shown us that we can do without the building if the worse comes to it. However, we can all confirm that we cannot do without the people. whatever we do, we should always remember that God called us through Jesus to love Him and love our neighbours as ourselves. Let that matter to us more than anything else.

Let it also be the central point of our zeal for service. We cannot be overzealous for God. Maybe at one point in your service for God you were feeling like you were too zealous. It could be that someone even mentioned that to you as a means of degrading your service. Jesus is telling us today that there is no overzealous person in the house of God because zeal for God's house is supposed to consume us.

Let this be an encouragement to someone today to continue faithfully and tirelessly serving God. Let us maintain our energy and enthusiasm for serving God. We might have taken a break, but Jesus is telling us that it is time to resume.

I'll end by expressing gratitude to all the leaders, volunteers and members of our congregation for their zeal in service so far. One way or another we have succeeded in pushing the vision of God's kingdom forward. We have been serving relentlessly as elders, board of managers, organists, Sunday school teachers, organizing soup luncheons and many other activities to keep the church going. Some of you are not present with us physically but are reading our sermons. We can never thank you enough for your services to God and to His people. We are always praying for you. May God continue to empower you and feel you with the joy of service and may His rewards be made evident in your lives. In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers

Loving God, we thank you for the world you created and the opportunities we have to enjoy its beauty and its life sustaining promise. When we find occasions to breathe in fresh air and exercise outdoors this winter, remind us of our partnership with you to care for creation. As spring comes closer and the sun shines longer each day, reawaken our hope in your promise of new life to sustain us as the weeks of the pandemic stretch on.

Ever present God, we thank you for walking with us through days of uncertainty as well as times of pleasure and satisfaction. In times of risk and stress, you provide a still point of calm. In times of challenge, you are the source of courage and confidence for us.

Thank you for hearing us when we pray, and for the wisdom and encouragement we receive from you. This day we pray for those who are struggling with the isolation and frustration the pandemic means for so many. Bring them peace and patience with your love.

We pray for churches whose common life has been changed so much by months of distancing. Keep us strong in faith and fellowship, so that we may serve as agents of healing and hope in our communities.

And we pray for all those who are enduring pain and illness, those who are facing grief and loss, and those who work on the front lines in our community, in health care, education, retail, emergency and public service. So many are exhausted by these months of pandemic. Be their comfort and encouragement day by day.

Holy God, in Jesus Christ you have built for us an eternal house, a temple of righteousness, a place of gracious plenty for the hungry and abundant life for the poor in spirit. Fill us with zeal for the body of Christ. Overturn the tables of corruption and greed and upset the imbalance of injustice, so that we may worship you in spirit and truth.

Lord Jesus there is within each one of us a reluctance to accept healing, a fear which stops us from changing. Sometimes Lord we are afraid to move away from what we have known even if it is hurtful to us. Give us strength to leave our brokenness behind and to be willing to accept your gift of wholeness.

Our God, we are poor and weak. Enrich us with your grace and make us strong enough to conquer temptation. May we seek the things that please you and turn away from anything that displeases you. So that we may persevere until death in doing your will.

Lord, we do not know what we should ask of you, but you already know what we need. You love us better than we know how to love ourselves. Father give to us,

your children that which we do not know how to ask. We have no desire other than to do your will. Teach us to pray and pray in us, in Jesus' name. Hear us now, as we pray together using the words Jesus taught us:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Benediction

May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ go with you wherever He may send you. May He guide you through the wilderness and protect you through the storm. May He bring you home rejoicing at the wonders He has shown you. May He bring you home rejoicing once again into our doors. Amen.