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Lent 3  
John 2:13-22  
3/11/12

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father -- to him be glory and power for ever and ever. (Rev 1:5-7)

### **John 2:13-22**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

A man gets a call from his doctor's office. They want him to come back in to talk about the test results. After waiting in the small exam room, the doctor comes in. He tells him that the results of the test are not good, that it's time to put his house in order. You know exactly what that means, don't you? Jesus, Because He Knew he was going to die...Put His House in Order.

This sermon text shows us a side of Jesus we aren't used to seeing, doesn't it? Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Passover – the annual festival that reminded the Jews of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt through the blood of a lamb painted on their doorways. The Passover, then, also very clearly pointed the people ahead to the sacrifice Jesus would give. Jesus was the true Lamb of God sent to deliver all people from the curse and slavery to sin and death by shedding his blood on the cross.

The Passover was the most important festival of the year for the Jewish people. And all Jewish males, 12 years and older, were required to be in Jerusalem for the festival. Jesus, then, had made the trip from Nazareth down to Jerusalem many times. This year, however, was different. Jesus' public ministry had just begun. He had begun to reveal the good news that he was the promised Savior, that he was the one who would take their sin away and give them eternal life.

So here comes Jesus – God in the flesh, God dwelling among his people – here comes Jesus to God's house, to the Temple, to the dwelling of God among his people. Everything about that Temple in Jerusalem and everything that went on at that Temple was another way God pointed his people ahead to Jesus. It was one big symbol of Jesus' work for them as their Savior.

So, Jesus comes into the Temple area, and what does he find? A lot of activity, but it was not the pious activity one would expect to find. The Temple grounds had become an honest-to-goodness market! Now, understand the layout of the Temple Mount a little bit. Think of it like a target. The Temple proper, the Temple building itself, was at the center with these different courtyards expanding out from there. It was in the outermost courtyard within the temple complex – known as the "Court of the Gentiles" that all this buying and selling was happening. This was the first area pilgrims and worshipers would come into when coming to worship God, to thank and to praise him.

Now, what was being done was necessary. The people coming for Passover – especially those who traveled great distances, needed provisions for their sacrifices. The animals that were to be sacrificed needed to be inspected to make sure they were suitable for sacrifice. Foreign currency needed to be exchanged in order to pay the temple tax. All of that was important, necessary stuff that was going on at the Temple. But it was also filled with corruption. Those selling the animals knew the people needed to buy them, so they jacked up the prices. The money changers, again, knew the people needed to pay

the temple tax, so they charged exorbitant fees for their services. Not only that, but none of this needed to happen in the Temple grounds!

The appearance of the Court of the Gentiles under these circumstances could not lead anyone to think about a spiritual relationship with the God of Israel. Instead of promoting the singing of psalms and hymns, visitors would be inclined to hold their purses and their noses. The stench of so many animals gathered in one place along with the bargaining and bickering over the cost of animals, the rates of exchange, and so forth also made this a spiritual stench to God. The people had corrupted the true worship of God. They had turned worship of God into an occasion to make a buck.

So Jesus put his house in order! Again, this isn't the side of Jesus we are used to seeing, is it? Jesus **"made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!'"** We are used to seeing the loving Savior inviting the poor and the meek to come to him. We are used to the patient Teacher instructing the misguided crowds. That's what we're used to, isn't it? – the loving, the kind, the compassionate, the patient Jesus. And that may lead us to think of Jesus as nothing more than your buddy, your pal. But here, righteous anger filled our Lord and he drove out those who would make a mockery of the Temple and the true worship that was to happen there. Here we see how serious Jesus is about all of God's Word! We see how serious Jesus is about sin and the need to get rid of it!

That leads us to think, what would Jesus drive out of you? After all, you are his house. Paul reminded the Corinthians of that fact a couple times. **"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple"** (1 Corinthians 3:16,17). **"If anyone destroys God's temple"** – that includes you. If you destroy, if you pollute, if you make a mockery of God's dwelling with you, God is serious about his threat. Paul also said, **"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body"** (1 Corinthians 6:19). God has made you into his dwelling, he has taken up residence with you, by bringing you to faith. You are now one of God's chosen people, one among whom God delights to dwell. You are God's house! And Jesus shows us that he is zealous for his house!

So, what would Jesus drive out of you? What would incite the righteous anger, the zeal of Jesus? The First Lesson this morning tells us, doesn't it? The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's Law in which he warns of those things which separate us from him. Harboring love for others ahead of him, misusing his name, despising his Word, disobeying his representatives, murder, adultery, stealing, destroying another's reputation, coveting. That whole catalogue of sin fills our lives each and every day! And that whole catalogue of sin flows out of a sinful heart bent on opposing God. **"For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'"** (Matthew 15:19,20a).

And there we see the real problem, don't we? The problem with what was happening at the Temple was not so much that they were buying and selling things – obviously, that was wrong and needed to stop. But the real problem was the inward attitude of the hearts of the people that manifested themselves in an outward disregard for God's House. It was the hearts of the people that were wrong. Their hearts harbored greed, their hearts despised God and his Word. The actions just followed.

The sin we commit is also an outward expression of the inward problem. The real problem is my ugly, rebellious heart which gives birth to such wicked desires! That is what Jesus wants to drive out of you! To put his house of your heart in order, Jesus is zealous to drive away the sinful rebellion of your heart. And this is something only he can do.

You and I may be able, to some degree, reform our actions. We may be able to keep our hands from taking what isn't ours, to keep our eyes from straying where they ought not – this usually happens for fear of punishment or embarrassment. But you and I are totally powerless to get rid of our sinful hearts. For that, we need Jesus.

And that is exactly why Jesus is so zealous for you! He is zealous for you because he cares about you! He is zealous to clear out the sin that is hiding in the deepest, darkest corners of your heart, because he cannot bear that sin bringing ruin upon you! He is zealous to put the house of your heart in order so that he and he alone can take up residence there and lead you through life to heaven. Jesus is zealous for you because he loves you!

Jesus' zeal for you, for your forgiveness and your eternal safety and security in heaven, his zeal for you led him to come to live and to die for you. Jesus' zeal for you led him to willingly go to the cross so that he could suffer the punishment your sin deserves in your place. His zeal for you led him die for you so that you won't die apart from him in hell because of your sin.

Jesus' zealous love for you is all-consuming. It led him to come to save you. It led him to set aside the glory and majesty of heaven so that through his life and death he can lift you up to his side in heaven!

And now his zeal for you leads him to come to you in his Word to set your heart in order, his zealous love for you leads him to come to you to drive away your sin. But he doesn't leave you empty. Through his Word and his Sacraments Jesus comes to fill you up with his love. He comes to fill you up with his forgiveness and strength to keep the clutter of sin from filling you back up. That's why we are going to sing, right after the sermon today, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."* We ask God, through the Word that we have heard, to strengthen in us our faith and our desire to live God-pleasing lives.

Now, with our hearts and lives put in order by Jesus' all-consuming love, you and I are free to go out as God's dwelling and show his love to others. You and I are free to serve one another in love and to spend our lives sharing the love of Jesus with others. That freedom is yours because Jesus has made your heart his home through faith.

Jesus knew he was going to die, but it wasn't the shock of hearing from your doctor that it is time to put your house in order. Jesus knew he was going to die because he had been looking forward to your forgiveness from the time Adam and Eve first brought the curse of sin and death to you. He knew he was going to die, but through his death, Jesus has won for you a clean heart. He has won for you a place in heaven which is prepared and ready and waiting. Jesus has set your heart in order – and you are his for all eternity!

Amen

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with

every spiritual blessing in Christ. (Eph 1:3)

Amen