

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
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**John 2:13-22**

**Zeal for God's House**

- 1. Learning from the cleansing Jesus carried out**
- 2. Learning from the confrontation that followed**

**Hymns: 387 –**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

**John 2:13-22 –**

<sup>13</sup> *When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.* <sup>14</sup> *In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.* <sup>15</sup> *So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.* <sup>16</sup> *To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”* <sup>17</sup> *His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”<sup>[e]</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> *The Jews then responded to him, “What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?”*

<sup>19</sup> *Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*

<sup>20</sup> *They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”* <sup>21</sup> *But the temple he had spoken of was his body.* <sup>22</sup> *After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.*

Do you remember some of the pictures of Jesus that have been painted and drawn?

Many favorites have been done down through the years:

- The classic portrait of Jesus with the brown background, with brown, wavy hair and soft tones.
- The picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, where he carries a lamb close to his chest with one arm and holds his staff with the other. Many sheep flock around him as he guides them through a pasture.
- The picture of Jesus with the little children. He smiles as children surround him. He has his arms around a couple of children that are close to him.

Perhaps you have your own favorite picture of Jesus that you remember from your past. However, I don't think any of you would think first of the “beloved” picture of Jesus fielding a whip and angrily driving people and animals out of the Temple. I don't think you dwell often on the sight of him yelling at the objects of his wrath as he drives them away from God's house.

I think we'd agree that Jesus had zeal for God's house. “Zeal,” according to the dictionary, is “**fervor for a cause... eager desire... enthusiastic diligence.**” Jesus certainly exhibited zeal in a way that is a bit shocking. So today, let's consider “**Jesus' Zeal for God's House.**” We will learn:

- 1. From the cleansing Jesus carried out**
- 2. From the confrontation that followed**

## **1. Learning from the cleansing Jesus carried out**

We read in John 2:13: “*When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*” This starts out as a heartwarming

scene for many reasons. Jesus was at the beginning of his earthly ministry. He had just performed his first miracle, turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana. He had recently gathered his disciples, and we hear that when he performs his first miracle their faith in him was strengthened. He is now heading to Jerusalem for the first Passover during his earthly ministry.

Do you remember the details surrounding the Passover? It was the great celebration that every Israelite took part in, looking back at the deliverance God had brought about when they left Egypt centuries before. God brought the final plague of the death of every firstborn in the land, but the Israelites who ate the Passover lamb and spread its blood on the doorframe were spared from that plague. Soon afterward, Moses had led them out of Egypt and God protected them from Pharaoh's army as he parted the waters of the Red Sea and they passed through.

Now, every year they commemorated that momentous event in their history in a weeklong celebration that every Jewish male was required to come to Jerusalem for. Sacrifices would be made at the Temple and the special Passover meal of the lamb eaten in many residences. Tens of thousands of visitors flocked to Jerusalem for this festival.

**The most beautiful thing of all is that the One to whom all this pointed was making his first appearance during his official ministry at this year's festival.** The Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world was there in the flesh. What a momentous time in history!

And then it all turned ugly. We read in verse 14, *"In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money."* That's a vivid verb used there, isn't it? Look what **"he found!"**

In the Court of the Gentiles, which included the large surrounding courtyards of the Temple, Jesus found cattle, sheep, and doves. And he found bankers conducting earnest business.

Let's back up for a moment. How could this have happened? It's understandable. The many, many people coming from out of town needed to make sacrifices. Down through the years a system of having animals available for purchase was developed for these people's convenience.

One knowledgeable commentator mentions that there were four shops at the Mount of Olives outside of town where you could take care of these details, but now shops had moved inside the Temple courts. Since your animal had to be officially OK'd by an inspector, it was probably safer to buy the animal right in the Temple. Of course you had to change your money into Jewish coin before you could do so. And every male Jew had to pay the Temple tax of a half shekel (in Jewish money only!) before the Passover.

Quite an elaborate preparation and system had developed for all this. Weeks before the Passover, shops and banks opened in outlying towns. Twenty days before the Passover the Temple marketplace in the Court of the Gentiles opened.

Because of this, the Passover worshiper that came to God's house did not come prompted to sing psalms and prepare for sacred worship. Instead, he came most likely holding his purse and his nose. They say that smell is your most memorable sense. One smell I can always remember is the smell of a circus. Have you been to a circus and walked around, seeing the animals? The smell is quite distinct! Such would be the smell in God's house at Passover time.

The sounds of the Temple marketplace would be quite distracting as well. The sound of the animals would be mixed with the sound of haggling, as money was weighed and its value debated by customers. Another vivid word in this reading is the word “**sitting.**” The bankers had taken up residence and were sitting at their tables, ready for your business. It was good business, but it was not God’s business. Along with the dealings that went on there was the added shame of dishonesty, most likely. The effects of such sound could be heard past the Court of the Gentiles into the worship areas. As worship went on, sounds and smells permeated the air.

One last background note: How did this reflect on the Gentiles in their court as they observed what was going on? What view would they have of Jehovah and his believers?

The focus of this festival was supposed to be on Christ, who was coming to his first Passover during his earthly ministry, so how did he react when he came to his festival and found these conditions? **He reacted with zeal.** *“He 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!’ His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”*

We see more vivid words here:

- “whip”
- “threw out”
- “overturned tables”
- “poured out coins”

We see the righteous anger of Christ act decisively and physically. Can you imagine the righteous anger and divine authority it

would have required to drive out that many people and animals? This was quite an undertaking and probably went on for some time! **Why would Jesus do this? He was moved by zeal for his Father’s house and his Father’s real business.**

Jesus felt so much zeal about his Father’s house and work that he would do this cleansing again three years later as he came to the Passover for the last time. Not surprisingly, the bankers and sellers had moved back into the Temple courtyards.

What can we learn today from the cleansing that Jesus carried out? Some obvious lessons can be gleaned from this account. Let’s briefly list first what we shouldn’t try to pin on this account as lessons for our faith today.

This account does not teach us that financial matters have no place at all in a church. No, for Jesus’ own entourage had a treasurer and a bank account in their money bag. This account does not teach churches today that they can never have a fundraising or money-making venture. We cannot equate this to forbidding our youth group having a car wash, or one of our groups to have a bake sale. It’s not sinful to have a Scrip program or an annual auction by Evergreen. Such events are optional for people to participate in and don’t need to be applied with pressure or distraction.

So what do we learn from this cleansing? Here are some obvious lessons:

- Undisturbed worship of our Lord and complete focus on him during our church services are vital. When our services are taking place and our Bible classes are being taught, it is time to focus on our Lord and his Word. The selling of baked goods or Scrip cannot be a distraction during those times of spiritual growth.

- Care must be taken in the number of money-making ventures offered and the pressure in which they are presented. A person coming to worship shouldn't be turned off by the question, "What new item will be hawked at church this week?"
- Guilt should not be applied to those who choose not to go to the auction or come to the car wash.
- Care should be taken in how visitors in our courts and sanctuary view us. Do we come across as a gathering who is all about money and who wants their money too? Or can we cultivate a more spiritual face than that?

Some deeper lessons lie here as well:

- Might money matters overshadow the spiritual ministry that we're trying to accomplish through our church? This is a difficult line to see at times. Fiscal responsibility is a good term to use at times, yet also operating in faith that God will open up our hearts to provide for our ministry must be in the picture. Is balancing the budget or finishing in the black the only gauge of a successful budget year? Or are there other gauges more spiritual that we use as for our church and school as well?
- Would money matters ever overshadow our outreach efforts, both formally through our church and personally in your life?
- Would we ever be tempted to pit money-making against proper stewardship of our members' offerings as a way to healthy finances? After all, if all of our church members use proper stewardship

principles we wouldn't have to talk about finances much!

Just a bit deeper:

- Would we be tempted to look at our relationship with God and our salvation as a "business transaction," feeling that if I go through the motions and fulfill my requirements (being at his house, giving my offering, doing my part) that I will merit my good standing before God, and forget about the Lenten Savior who won my salvation by his suffering and death on the cross?

**Such lessons are to be learned well from Jesus' cleansing of the Temple!**

## 2. Learning from the confrontation that followed

One other lesson must be learned from this reading. It's a lesson that we find in the close of these verses as the Jewish leaders confront Jesus. It's a vivid lesson this Lenten season. Our account closes with: *"Then the Jews demanded of him, 'What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' The Jews replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken."*

An interesting note about Jesus' encounter with the Jewish leaders is that they did not question the propriety about what Jesus had done. They questioned the authority that he had to be the one to carry this cleansing out! They wanted a sign that he had the right to

do this! Jesus gave them a sign that makes us wonder. He tells them that if they destroy his body, he will rise in three days. Obviously, they don't get the full implication of his sign on that day. Why would he give them that sign, then?

Remember whom he is talking to. He is talking to the religious leaders of the people with whom he will have conflict and arguments in the three years to come. In fact, the market at the Temple was called "the bazaar of the sons of Annas." (Alfred Edersheim) This is an early, clear signal to them. Would they plot to destroy him down the road? Did they feel like it at the time of our text?

In addition, would they understand what he was trying to say later on? It's quite ominous that when Jesus is arrested by them in the Garden of Gethsemane and put on trial, Matthew 26 tells us: *"The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two came forward and declared, 'This fellow said, "I am able to destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days." ' Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, 'Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?' But Jesus remained silent."*

It's also ominous that as Jesus is mocked on the cross in Matthew 27, it says, *"Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!'"* It's interesting that they twisted his words about who would do the destroying!

Finally, it's ominous that after Jesus died, Matthew tells us, *"The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. 'Sir,' they said, 'we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, "After three days I will rise again." So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.'"*

Did they remember his words?

**Jesus' sign to them was that although they would attempt to destroy him and his earthly Temple, he would triumph over them and over death by his resurrection. In it he would accomplish his mission of suffering and dying for the sin of the world. He would accomplish your salvation!**

In hindsight, it's noteworthy to us this Lent that here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the battle lines are drawn, the power struggle is defined, the key sides are taken, and the struggle is on. And the sign would be fulfilled as in three years the battle would come to a head and Christ would win!

As we think deeply about those implications this morning, we marvel at our Savior's resolve to complete his mission. He has full knowledge of what lies ahead and yet he embraces the battle and moves forward in his mission. Nothing will deter him from winning your salvation as his Father has sent him to do and as has been predicted by Scripture about him. All for you. All for your salvation. All fulfilled as we commemorate this Lent.

So, is this picture of Jesus worth remembering? Is this picture of him turning red, taking action, even brandishing a whip worth a picture? It certainly is! For here we

see a Savior with zeal for God's house and for his own mission. He is the Passover Lamb who has come to fulfill his Father's plan and win your salvation.

May such zeal fill our hearts for God's house and for our church's mission! Amen.