

INI - SDG

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2010

Prince of Peace Lutheran Church

Hecla, SD

Text: John 2:13-22 *Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned their tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up." So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.*

Theme: LENT - TIME FOR SPIRITUAL SPRING CLEANING

Dear fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus,

Are you a hoarder or a junker? A hoarder is someone who likes to hang onto things, even if it seems like worthless junk. Only a hoarder does not think of it as junk. He thinks it is something he might need someday and thus, would be a waste to throw it away. Now, the exact opposite of that is someone who likes to throw away everything. If it isn't nailed down and hasn't been used in the last year, it goes to the dump. It gets thrown because it is just taking up space and messing up the house.

For many homes, spring means its time to thoroughly clean house! As the temperatures warm the windows are opened, the stuffy winter air is let out and the fresh spring air is let in. In older homes storm windows are removed and screen put up in their place. It is time for spring cleaning. It is time do decided what to keep, what to throw, and what to sell at the rummage sale. As spring cleaning begins at your home, will you have trouble letting some things go or will you be anxious to get rid of stuff?

Regardless of how you approach cleaning your home, there is a little bit of hoarder in each one of us. There is a little bit of us that has trouble letting things go - especially when it comes to our old man of sin. Our old man of sin wants to hoard all sorts of sins. Our old man loves those things which God forbids and wants to throw out those things which God has told us to do. And the more commandments God gives, the more our old man wants to do things his way.

Even as we use spring as a good time to get rid of the junk in our homes, the season of Lent is a time of year when we do some spiritual spring cleaning. Lent is a time of repentance as we view the cost of our salvation. Let us examine how and why Jesus cleansed the temple in

Jerusalem and pray that He would so cleanse the temple of our hearts and drive out anything which is offensive. May God bless us and strengthen us through the hearing of His Word.

The picture we see of Jesus on the cover of our bulletin is one that we are not used to seeing. The description of Jesus in our sermon text is one we are not used to hearing. We are used to Jesus as our loving Good Shepherd, who cares and tends for our needs. We are used to the scene of Jesus taking the little children up in His arms and blessing them. What would offend our kind, wise, heavenly Friend so much so that He would enter the temple and make a whip to drive animals and people out of the temple?

To learn why Jesus was so offended at what He found in the temple, we first need to understand what the Temple in Jerusalem was for. The temple was the center piece of the Old Testament worship life. It was at the temple that God promised, "My name shall be there." There at the temple the people could come and worship the LORD God. At the temple they would offer their prayers. On the Day of Atonement, the people would come to the temple to confess their sins and a sacrifice would be made for the sins of the people. It was at the temple in Jerusalem that daily offerings were made to God because of sin. It was in the temple in Jerusalem that the people were to gather together for their major religious festivals. At the temple the LORD God would put His name on the people to bless them as the priest gave the benediction.

The temple was to be sacred to the people. It was to be set apart and dedicated to the worship of the one true God. It was to be different from all other places. At the temple they were reminded of the holiness of God whom they had offended because of their sin. At the temple they would see the bloody sacrifices which were necessary for their sins. All of this was to be a reminder and a picture of the Lamb of God who would shed His blood to forgive their sins.

When a Jewish family would travel to Jerusalem for one of the festivals, such as Passover, they were to bring an animal to sacrifice for their family. Different animals were prescribed for different festivals and different financial situations. If a family did not raise animals or lived a great distance away, they could buy an animal in Jerusalem for the sacrifice. Originally the marketplace for such animals would have been within the city walls of Jerusalem. Then entrepreneurs found they could get more business if they made things more convenient by moving closer to the temple. Eventually, the sale of animals and the exchange of foreign currency actually made its way into the temple itself.

It probably made sense for the business owners to conduct business right within the temple walls. After all the people needed to buy animals to sacrifice at the temple and they had animals to sell. So why not just make it easy for the people and easy for business to sell them at the temple. Same with the moneychangers. People who traveled from far away needed to exchange their foreign money to pay the temple tax, so why not just set up tables right where the people needed their money exchanged. It made a great deal of business sense.

That brings us to the point of our text today. Jesus has just begun His public ministry and is in Jerusalem, as the Law required, to celebrate the Passover. Jesus is offended at the sight before Him. Imagine coming to church and trying to pray while oxen, sheep, and doves are making a commotion in the entryway. Imagine trying to listen to the pastor as he shouts over the noise of business transactions taking place just outside the sanctuary doors.

As offensive as that is, even more so, was the fact that this place of worship had become a

place of business. The business of the world was intruding on the temple which bore the name of the Triune God. Therefore, when Jesus ***had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."***

But what does any of this have to do with spring cleaning and Lent? Today you will not find a Jewish temple in Jerusalem. In fact, where this Old Testament temple once stood, there now is a Muslim mosque, dedicated to the worship of Allah. By allowing the sale of animals and banking business, the Jews showed the contempt they had for God and His house. Furthermore, when Jesus came, He was the fulfillment of the temple. He is the great High Priest who makes intercession for the people. He is the Lamb of God sacrificed for sin. And they rejected the temple of Jesus and destroyed His by demanding He be crucified.

While there is no temple standing in Jerusalem, the temple of God is still on this earth. Paul told us of this temple in our New Testament lesson. ***"Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God."*** (1 Cor 6:19) You are the New Testament temple! Every believer in Christ is a walking, talking temple of the living God. In the Old Testament God filled the temple with His glory. Now God has given you His Holy Spirit. His Spirit fills you!

The temple of the LORD was dedicated to the worship and praise of God. It was to be a house of prayer. As the temple of the Holy Spirit we are to be no different! We have been separated and dedicated to God for His holy purposes. ***"For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."*** (1 Cor 6:20) Each one of our bodies was bought at a price. The price was very steep to ransom our souls from hell. It cost the Son of God His very life to buy us back. Therefore Paul says, we are not our own. We have been purchased. As temples of the Holy Spirit, our bodies belong to God and are to be used to glorify God.

But just as the things of the world made their way into the temple in Jerusalem, the things of the world have made their way into these temples of the Holy Spirit. Things which we want to hang onto and hoard, even as the unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem wanted to hang onto the marketplace in the temple. There is a laundry list of sins that our old man does not want to give up. Selfishness, laziness, gambling, gossiping, drunkenness, dirty movies, dirty websites, dirty magazines. These are things we would NEVER imagine of allowing in God's house, but somehow when it comes to the temple of the Holy Spirit, we don't want to let them go.

And then there are those "secret sins." Sins which we don't even realize we know we are doing. Or sins which we've become so comfortable with in our lives, that we don't even think of them as being sinful. Or sins which have become so acceptable in the world and with our friends, that we don't even realize they are offensive to God. Much like the moneychangers didn't think they were doing anything wrong.

We need Jesus to come into our hearts with a whip of cords and cleanse the temple that is in our hearts. David prayed for the same thing when in Psalm 139 he said, ***"Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me, and know my anxieties; And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting."*** (Ps 139:23-24) Like a squirrel digging for the nut it buried in the ground, so we need God to dig around in our heart. We need God to cleanse us

from all our secret faults.

How does God do this? He does it through the power of His Word. Jesus uses the cords of the Law to make a whip which beats down our old Adam. With the Law God shows us what is pleasing and displeasing in His sight. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to put on our new man of faith which delights to do God's bidding. By the Holy Spirit working through His Word our old man of sin is drownd by daily contrition and repentance.

While this is to be done daily in the Christian life, it is especially true in the season of Lent. During Lent our hearts and minds are focused especially on the cost of our sins and the salvation of our soul. Lent is a time for spiritual spring-cleaning. May Jesus ever come into our hearts and use the whip of the Law to drive out our old Adam who loves to hoard sin. May the Holy Spirit continue to work in our hearts through His Means of Grace that we may daily put on our new man and use these temples of the Holy Spirit to glorify the God who saved us! May God help us to this end, Amen.