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**Weekend of Sunday, March 1, 2020**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Lent/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year A**  
**First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7**  
**Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:12-20**  
**Gospel Reading: John 2:13-25**  
**Sermon Title: "Cleansing Our Temples"**

## **Theme**

*Jesus attacks the commercialization of religion by driving merchants out of the temple. When challenged, he responds mysteriously, with the first prediction of his own death and resurrection. In the midst of a seemingly stable religious center, Jesus suggests that the center itself has changed.*

## **Text**

<sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup>Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. <sup>23</sup>When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup>and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

## Sermon

Welcome to the sermon time for the weekends of Lent. This Lent I will be preaching and teaching on the theme of “Journey with Jesus through John” and I would like to begin by explaining this.

I noticed early in my planning for Lent that all the Gospel Readings for Lent came from the Gospel of John except one, and they were in a linear order. I like it when there is a linear order because it will allow me to tell the story – and that story is a journey with Jesus through John.

The one weekend where the Gospel Reading is not from John is this weekend. The Gospel Reading prescribed for today by the lectionary is Matthew’s version of Jesus’ Temptation in the Wilderness. So if you came looking forward to hearing that story, I’m sorry. I’ve replaced it with John’s version of Jesus’ Cleansing of the Temple.

There are a couple of themes that I will unpack over the course of this and the next four weekends of Lent, and one is the theme of knowing, or knowledge. Some questions you can expect us to explore are:

- What do we, or can we know for sure?
- Does God revealed in Jesus Christ want to be known?
- How is it that God revealed in Jesus Christ seems to know us so well?

And then as I mentioned in the sermon last weekend, it is my opinion that Lent is supposed to be a season of *observation*. You see, it appears to me that the Gospel Readings this Lent are stories of Jesus doing something and all we can do is observe him. He cannot or does not ask us to “go and do likewise.” It would appear that what we are to do during Lent is simply observe him, although there are certainly lessons we can learn and actions we can take which I will bring out at the conclusion.

In order to get started today, let’s take a quick look at the beginning of John’s Gospel and observe some themes that he set up, that will recur in the weeks ahead. You may want to pull your pew Bible out to follow along.

## In John

- 1:1-3 Jesus Christ is identified as the “Word” through whom all things came into being.
- 1:6-9 Jesus Christ is identified as the “true light.”
- 1:13 Those who believe in Jesus Christ are identified as “children of God” and born of God.
- 1:18 Where I get the phrase, “God revealed in Jesus Christ.”
- 1:29&35 John the Baptist identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God who take away the sin of the world.”
- 1:41 The newly called disciple, Andrew, identified Jesus as the “Messiah.”
- 1:45 The newly called disciple, Philip, identified Jesus as the one “about whom Moses and the law and also the prophets wrote.”
- 1:49 The newly called disciple, Nathanael, identified Jesus as “Rabbi,” “Son of God,” and “King of Israel”
- 1:51 Jesus identified himself as the “Son of Man”

All this to say that, according to the Gospel of John, when Jesus came on to the scene, he made quite an impression. These are the ways that he made himself “known” to his disciples, and how they identified him after their initial encounter with him, and then they stayed with him for another three years until the events of his Passion.

Finally, let’s get started with the Gospel Reading for today.

All four Gospels have a version of Jesus’ Cleansing of the Temple. In the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke the event took place on the same day as Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the event we call Palm Sunday. But the placement of the story is much different in John. In John the event is in Chapter Two at the beginning of his public ministry. In fact, according to John’s Gospel, the only thing Jesus did up to this point was to call a few but not all of his disciples and be badgered by his mother into performing party tricks at a wedding.

From what John wrote at the beginning of our Gospel Reading, we know that the Passover was near. We also know that this was not the Passover at which Jesus’ Passion unfolded. This was three years earlier, according to John. We also know

that Jerusalem, the capital city of Judaism and home of the Temple, swelled to many times its normal size during Passover. So with the crowds came a little extra tension and an opportunity to make a bigger impact. So the timing of this event, the cleansing of the Temple, was no accident.

We also know that Passover was a pilgrimage festival, meaning that Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem to worship and make sacrifice because the Temple was the only place that sacrifice could be offered.

Now a pilgrim could bring his own beast for the sacrifice, but then he would have to pack food for the beast, and hope that it made the trip, that it didn't become lame along the way, or fall into the hands of bandits, so a business opportunity was born.

Say, wouldn't it be nice if I could just be concerned about getting myself there, and then buy a beautiful bull or ram from "Joe's Sacrificial Animals?"

And so that is what happened. A business sprung up and so there on the day that Jesus arrived, likely on the Court of the Gentiles in front of the beautiful gleaming white stone Temple, there were animals of all kinds for sale, along with the umh, residue and fragrance of animals, and the loud voices of the dealers competing for the business of the pilgrims. Not a very peaceful spiritual experience.

### Exodus 20:1-4 (KJV)

20 And God spake all these words, saying,

<sup>2</sup>I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

<sup>3</sup>Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>Thou shalt not make unto thee any **graven image**, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

And there were also money changers there, and these too served a practical purpose. You might recall that a sub-commandment of the First Commandment was a prohibition against "graven images" according to the King James Version, and the Jews took that to mean that the coinage of the Roman Empire was forbidden to be used for tithes, offerings, and the Temple tax at the Temple, and so another business

opportunity was born. Money changers would exchange whatever coinage a pilgrim had for Temple coinage that did not have the head of Caesar on it. So, if we could, we might ask Jesus, wasn't money changing a necessary function?

Jesus likely had two problems with the animal merchants and the money changers that elicited his rage:

Have you ever bought a refreshing drink while sitting in the hot stadium and you had to pay like \$8 for a thing that you could buy at the grocery store for less than a dollar? Profiteering was likely happening and Jesus might have thought that that practice took advantage of the pilgrims there to worship.

And the other problem that Jesus might have had was that the noise and smell and commerce that was happening was exactly counter to why pilgrims came to the Temple. These activities would have detracted from the proper function of the Temple as a "house of prayer for all peoples." (Isaiah 56:7)

So in his upset, Jesus made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the Temple yelling indignantly, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (:16)

The story goes on. There was his comment about 'destroying this Temple, and in three days he will raise it up,' and his disciples remembering that he had said this after the resurrection, and their interpreting him to mean his body, and so on. But I want to move on to the last paragraph and to my questions.

<sup>23</sup>When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup>But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup>and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

In this last paragraph we get the answers to my questions most clearly.

- What do we, or can we know for sure?

Jesus came onto the scene and took charge and got away with it. He is pretty clear about who he is, isn't he? John even mentioned that he needed no one's testimony about himself.

- Does God revealed in Jesus Christ want to be known?

Well, he did not come onto the Temple grounds in a disguise. In his disgust to cleanse the Temple, he called God his Father. That would have been blasphemous! And he is someone zealous for the LORD, and one who is not happy at all with what Judaism has made out the Temple to be; and Temple was just emblematic of all Judaism.

- How is it that God revealed in Jesus Christ seems to know us so well?

Remember back at the beginning of this sermon I introduced several Johannine themes that will matter as we travel along this “Journey with Jesus through John.” One of the bullet points was that John identified Jesus as the “Word” from the beginning, the one through whom “all things came into being” (1:3). So Jesus, the Word, was involved in creation. He spoke and creation happened. So he knows us, because he is our creator.

The First Reading is a story of how sin came into the world, but we know we face the same decision Eve and Adam failed at, every moment of every day. Will we be obedient to the LORD our God, or will we decide to go our own way? Some things never change.

### **Raisin’ the Bar Challenge**

And so we need a season like Lent to reflect on our own our disobedience and willingness to enter into sin, knowing that God revealed in Jesus Christ already knows us, and in fact knows us better than we know ourselves, and yet loved us all the way to the cross, and through the grave.

Today’s Gospel Reading is a story that John wrote so well enough that we can watch it play out in the theater of our minds. All we can do is observe it.

Jesus didn’t teach a particular lesson. There was no “go and do likewise.” But what we can do is “Cleanse our Temples.” In the Second Reading, the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. And so perhaps the one thing we ought to take away this week is that we all have junk in our lives that we know we ought to shed. Let’s commit to the cleansing of our

Temples this week and then be vigilant in not letting our Temples get cluttered up with the stuff of life that prevents God the Holy Spirit from residing in us, its Temple. And then we will have room for heavenly things that we will talk about next weekend.

### **Prayer**

Holy God, through your Son you have called us to live faithfully and act courageously. Keep us steadfast in your covenant of grace, and teach us the wisdom that comes only through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen