

Scripture:

John 2:13-22

“He overturned the tables.”

In our gospel reading today we see that it was about the time for the Jewish Passover festival in Jerusalem.

The very first verse reads --- “When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”

The Passover was --- and still is ---- the greatest of all Jewish festivals ----- indeed it was mandated that every adult male who lived within 20 miles of Jerusalem was bound to gather in Jerusalem and worship.

And not only this ---- but Jews scattered all over the ancient world gathered in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover.

Will Barclay estimates that 2 and a quarter million Jews assembled in Jerusalem for the Passover in the time of Christ.

2 and a quarter million.

And this is significant because all those gathered would need to have the temple tax in Jewish coinage --- foreign currency wasn't accepted for the temple tax.

Which means there was a need for money changers.

And not only would all those coming from outlying territories need to visit the money changers for local currency ----- but they would also need to purchase the appropriate sacrificial animals.

Often times it wasn't practical to travel from afar with the appropriate sacrificial livestock in tow --- it was far more feasible to simply buy them in the city upon arrival.

The point is ----- the fact that there were money changers --- and others selling various animals for the sacrifices --- was not unusual.

Indeed it was laid out in the Talmud --- the accepted teachings of the Jewish Rabbi's ----- that there not only ought to be money changers but that they also be permitted to make a small profit --- or "kollubos".

So the money changers ---- or --- "kollubistai"--- as well as those selling cattle ----- sheep and doves ---- that Jesus talks about in verse 14 of John's gospel today were not all that unusual ----- and were in fact welcomed and necessary.

And the fact that there were likely a whole lot more than usual --- on account of all the extra Jews arriving from outlying territories --- was not all that unusual either.

It was a pretty grand and exciting setting ---- that we come to in John's gospel reading today.

The temple had finally been refurbished --- and rebuilt again ---- 46 years in the making --- according to verse 20 from John's gospel today.

Over 2 million people gathered from far and wide to celebrate God's goodness.

It was highest of High times --- the Passover.

Folks were paying up their temple tax ---- and they were purchasing the appropriate and acceptable sacrifices.

All was looking pretty good in Jerusalem.

Bustling community ---- taxes ---- sacrifices ---- prosperity --- for the great and holy city --- and its holiest of Holy places --- the Temple.

But as we soon see ---- this is not how Jesus saw it.

He was disappointed and frustrated.

Verse 15 paints the picture of a pretty dramatic scene.

There we see that Jesus make a whip out of cords and ----- “drove all from the temple courts ---- both sheep and cattle ---- scattering the coins of the money changers and overturning their tables.”

It’s a very passionate and hands on Jesus that we find in John’s gospel today.

And we do well to remember that this likely wasn’t just a sudden --- or knee jerk act of passion.

Jesus had likely been to the temple day in and day out for a few days observing what was happening there.

Until finally this day --- He decides to act --- and disrupt --- and re-orient the focus of the activities there.

And it’s a pretty powerful and dramatic image ----- Jesus with a whip -----
---- driving out animals --- scattering coins ---- and flipping over tables.

Jesus wouldn’t do something this dramatic and this powerful and this meaningful just on a whim.

He likely observed what was happening --- pondered His approach ---- and then acted.

Things had obviously gone way far off track for Jesus to have to act so decisively and dramatically.

Indeed this may be the most striking image we have of Christ.

Yes we see Him after the crucifixion --- post resurrection --- walking around ---- which is pretty dramatic --- but it’s not as though He jumped down from the cross --- and marched back into the town square.

He was buried --- and 3 days pass ----- before He mysteriously emerges from His grave --- the rock somehow rolled away --- the tomb empty.

But here --- in John’s gospel today ---- we see Him with a whip driving animals ---- scattering coins ---- and flipping tables over --- money --- feathers ---- fur ---- flying everywhere.

Clearly He wasn't happy ---- and clearly He felt He had to act.

Remembering that money changers and sacrifice sellers --- handlers of livestock were necessary and not only permitted but welcomed ---- the reaction of those present is fascinating.

So Jesus comes into the temple courts and puts on quite a show --- flipping tables --- scattering coins and driving out the animals.

And their response is what?

Verse 18 --- "What sign can you show us to prove your authority?"

Imagine ---- "Get out of here!" --- and ---- "Stop turning my Father's house into a market." ----- with whip in hand ----- as scatters coins --- overturns tables ---- and drives animals out.

And the response is ---- "Show us a sign ---- prove your authority."

It would have been completely understandable if the authorities had of hand cuffed Jesus and arrested Him then and there.

There were after all lots of visitors --- hundreds of thousands of visitors perhaps even --- there was a great need for bankers and farmers --- to meet the Jewish tax requirements --- and ritual laws.

But they don't lead Him away or arrest Him ----- instead they simply ask Him ---- "What sign can you show us to prove your authority?"

"What sign can you show us to prove your authority?"

In other words ---- "Well wait just a minute --- maybe he's on to something -- let's see what else he's got in store for us today."

But of course when Jesus answers as He does ---- saying that He can raise the destroyed temple up in 3 days --- they soon decide that they're not on the same page after all ----- and that His authority is likely a little questionable.

They imagine the bricks and mortar ----- the stones and steps of the newly 46 years in the making temple ---- whereas He is talking about the flesh and blood --- bones and sinew temple ---- that is His body.

And so the great divide between what Jesus is talking about and what the culture He lives in thinks He means ---- begins.

As Jesus stood in the temple courts that day --- no one truly recognized Him for who He was ----- or what He was about to do.

God's Son --- the soon to be revealed Messiah that they were all waiting for --- Saviour of the world ---- restorer of justice --- God's great rescue plan.

When He spoke about temple they thought rocks ----- instead of body and soul.

When He spoke about power and influence --- they thought of force and might --- instead of service and love.

Jesus didn't just overturn the tables in the temple courts that day ---- He began the great cosmic act of overturning expectations --- and assumptions - ---- possibilities ----- perceptions ----- priorities ---- and all that the people held near and dear.

Jesus is the great table overturner and then some.

Jesus is the great Saviour --- and then some.

The great Lord and then some.

The great re-organizer and reverser and then some.

And very early on in His ministry ---- at least according to John's gospel ---- - we have this great and dramatic public act of overturning and reversing.

A sign of what is to come.

But the people didn't see it ----- "What sign can you show us to prove your authority?" ---- they ask after He acts.

The money changers had eclipsed the true function and meaning of the temple.

The temple courts began to look like just about any other place in town.

The same attitudes and practices and concerns --- that were found in the market places and streets of town ---- began to creep into the temple courts - ---- on their way to the very temple itself.

And Jesus wasn't about to sit by idly and let it happen.

The reverence and awe.

The mystery and beauty and wonder ----- the understanding that this --- the temple was a place God --- was eroding away.

The Holy ----- grace filled --- God given temple ---- was on its way to becoming just another one of the overcrowded profit driven market stalls in the bustling city of Jerusalem.

There was ceasing to be anything different and distinct ---- and Holy about the temple.

So in walks Jesus restoring right and true --- faithful --- and just ---- focus again.

Turning things over and setting them right again.

But of course it goes a whole lot further than just this too.

Jesus wasn't just restoring a sense of decorum and appropriateness to the temple in John's gospel today.

He's also turning that on its head as well.

Ushering in the new reality that is the ushering in of His way ---- and the New Covenant.

Just as the people are misguided in wanting a sign from Jesus in order to prove His authority.

And just as they are misguided about what He means by rebuilding a temple --- thinking He's talking about stones and bricks and mortar ---- instead of flesh and blood.

So they are misguided by all that He ushers forth and brings in --- fulfillment.

As Jesus stood in the temple courts that day after driving out the animals and scattering the coins and overturning the tables --- no one truly recognized Him or understood Him for all He truly was ---- God's Son.

The long awaited Messiah and Saviour of the world ----- that they all anticipated and yearned for.

The tables were overturned all right --- they just had no idea as to the magnitude nor focus of the overturning.

It wasn't just about a few coins --- and couple of cattle and sheep.

Life.

All authority and power --- had shifted as well.

The very foundations of the city and the culture --- the whole world shifted that day.

Jesus' message and new way may have began in one place --- Israel ----- through one people --- the Jews ----- but it very quickly moved far beyond just one people -----and one place ----- and into all the world.

But few really saw it at first.

Sometimes it takes a keen eye ---- and a discerning heart to appreciate Christ at work in the world.

Yes ----- it can be discouraging ----- and difficult to understand sometimes.

ISIS.

Boko harem.

Domestic violence.

Human trafficking.

Bullying and so on.

Suffering.

But Christ is forever turning over the tables of troubled hearts and misguided priorities.

And he does so in ways and times and fashions ---- that we can't always recognize ---- or appreciate.

Just as Jesus stood in Jerusalem and observed how things had gone awry.

So He stands in the midst of the world today observing.

And just as He stepped into the action then.

So He steps into the action still today.

Nothing that happened in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover was lost on Jesus.

Nothing that happens in the world today is lost on Jesus.

He knows all hearts --- and He knows just when to step in.

He has overturned the tables.

He is overturning the tables.

And He will continue to overturn the tables.

His kingdom is coming.

Indeed His kingdom is already here --- inside the hearts of all who believe --
-- and know --- and accept Him.

Lent is a great opportunity to remember --- and to consider --- and to
celebrate.

To give thanks and praise for all of the ways that God is overturning --- re-
prioritizing ----- and reshaping us.

God is forever holding us in the palm of his hands --- fashioning and
refashioning us.

Overturning the corrupt ways of the world.

And cleaning out our hearts.

God is in our midst --- Christ acting in our world ---- and decisively.

We and all that we see are in transition.

And God is the master maker.

Amen.