

March 4th 2018 Communion

Scripture:

Psalm 19

Numbers 20:1-13

John 2:13-22

“Jesus was not a happy camper.”

Perhaps some of us may remember hearing about an experiment that the Washington Post conducted a few years back --- about 11 years ago now --- time flies.

Like so many things these days ---- it was thanks to the internet that the experiment came to so many people's attention.

In this case it was a Youtube video that garnered all the attention and not the newspaper article that started it all.

The Washington Post approached the world renowned violinist and composer Joshua Bell --- and asked if he would play at a subway station in Washington D.C. incognito to see if anyone would even recognize him.

Reluctant at first Bell eventually agreed.

So he donned a T-shirt and baseball cap and played 6 classical pieces for 43 minutes at a subway station on Friday January 12th 2007 starting at 7:51 am during morning rush hour.

In his hands was his favourite violin --- a Stradivarius constructed in 1713 valued at 3.5 million dollars.

So you have young kid --- baseball hat ---t-shirt ---- and at the same time you have world renowned concert virtuoso ---- and his 3.5 million dollar instrument.

According to those watching as the experiment unfolded 1,096 people walked by without really taking any notice ----- some tossed in pennies ---- others quarters --- and so on.

Eventually ---- at the very end of his 43 minute set ---- 1 person did recognize him and threw in a twenty --- bringing his total to \$32 and 17 cents over 43 minutes.

Bell later joked that he could probably make a living on that --- “almost 40 an hour” ---- he quipped.

Of course just weeks earlier people paid well over \$100 a ticket to hear him in Boston.

Does anyone recall seeing the Youtube video of this --- type in Joshua Bell -- and you'll find it no problem.

They even did a follow up subway appearance and thousands packed in to hear him again --- him the virtuoso and not just the subway busker in T-shirt --- and Washington Nationals ball cap.

The point is ----- too often we don't even realize what is happening right before us ---- often we fail to see or recognize who and what is happening in front of our eyes --- we have become kind of numb to much that happens day in and day out ---- we can all too easily go into autopilot --- and become almost drone like.

John 2 is a perfect example of this drone like --- auto pilot kind of approach to life.

In John 2 today the people really have no idea what is happening right before them --- who is standing right in front of them --- and the new message that He is bringing.

And further they figure they're pretty close to getting it right --- and as far as they're concerned pretty close is close enough.

But sometimes pretty close isn't close enough at all --- sometimes close enough is really far too far off base.

Sometimes ---- often even it seems in the Bible --- when it comes do doing as God asks of us ----- acute attention to detail is asked of us.

For example --- Moses kind of --- or mostly ---- got it right when it came to drawing the water out of the rock in Numbers today.

The money changers --- and others in the temple courts ---- kind of got it right --- mostly got it right in John's gospel today.

But kind of and mostly --- didn't cut it in either of these instances if we look a little closer and carefully.

In verse 8 from Numbers today God says ----- "Take the staff" --- God is talking to Moses here ---- "Take the staff --- and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together.

Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.

You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

And then in verse 11 this is what Moses and Aaron do --- "Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank."

Seems simple enough ---- close enough ----- God says speak to the rock --- they smack the rock --- to real big difference --- either way ---- the water gushed out ---- no huge difference ----- all is well the people and their livestock got the water --- in the version of this story in Exodus (chapter 17) we don't have the same kind of detail ---- but here in numbers God wasn't happy about how this all went down.

And we know he wasn't happy ---- because of the next verse ----which reads this way ----- "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron --- "Because you did not trust me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

And of course as we well know neither Moses nor Aaron ever enter into the Promised Land.

Moses struck the rock instead of simply speaking to the rock --- and so God says to him --- "Because you did not do as I instructed ---- because you did not trust me and simply speak to the rock --- you will not enter into the Promised Land" --- and of course Moses never does --- dying right there on

the brow of the mountain looking out over the Promised Land but never actually entering into it.

Curious ----- that after all this time --- after Egypt ---- the Passover ---- the Plagues ---- the parting of the water at the Red Sea ---- after all of this it's curious ---- that Moses is portrayed here as lacking trust in God at this time -- near the end of the road --- they're almost home.

Many rocks in the desert at that time had water tables below them --- just below the surface ----- many scholars agree that it was common to strike a certain rock in a certain way and for water to come gushing out from it.

So God says to Moses --- "Speak to the rock and water will come from it."

"Speak to the rock and water will come from it."

Apparently ---- at least according to God ---- Moses didn't trust God enough to simply speak to the rock ---- so he ---Moses ----- struck the rock twice with his rod --- and out comes the water.

God is frustrated enough ---- disappointed enough ----- something enough -- -- that Moses didn't follow exactly as He said --- that He says to Moses --- "Because of your lack of trust here you will not enter the Promised Land."

Verse 12 again ---- "But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

And so here in Numbers 20 today we have the very reason why Moses never enters into the Promised Land.

Moses came pretty close to doing what God asked ---- isn't pretty close --- tap the rock twice with his stick instead of simply speaking to it ---- that water did come out after all --- God did still bless the people with water ---- but apparently Moses didn't follow God's direction close enough --- because what he chose to do barred him from entering into the Promised Land.

Sometimes close enough ---- just isn't enough ----- sometimes it's all or it's nothing with God --- sometimes we actually have to follow all the details that God gives to us.

And a willingness to follow all the details to the letter takes a certain kind of patience and disposition -- for whatever reason Moses doesn't quite listen closely enough --- or act totally in line enough with what God asked of him.

Instead of speaking to the rock as God said ---- Moses decides to tap the rock twice with his stick.

When it comes to God --- close enough isn't always good enough.

It's got to be all in when it comes to God --- and clearly all the details matter sometimes.

And then there are the money changers and the sacrifice providers in John's Gospel.

Money changers were not only allowed in the Temple Courts they were necessary.

Those who supplied the various sacrifice offerings ---- livestock and wheat were not only allowed in the Temple Courts they were necessary --- people came from far off and it wasn't always possible to bring what they needed from such a great distance so they could purchase it in the Temple Courts.

People came from all around to purchase the appropriate livestock and wheat offerings for sacrifice at the Temple.

There were various currencies and so money changers were often necessary in the Temple courts to facilitate the sacrificial offering process.

The problem wasn't with the money changes and the offering providers conceptually or in principle --- the problem Jesus had with them was that they had become too much of the focus --- and their presence as it was --- was becoming misleading and disproportionately emphasized.

The temple courts were beginning to look no different from any other market place --- they had ceased to be anything Holy and special and set apart.

And so ----- in a rare and powerful moment Jesus acts rather decisively ----- He flips over tables ---- scatters coins ---- and drives out the sacrificial livestock with a whip.

Jesus was not a happy camper when He saw what was happening in the Temple Courts --- what was happening was pretty close to how it ought to happen ----- it was kind of close to being on the mark --- but clearly it was also way off at the same time.

A millimeter may not be much when it comes to laying patio stones --- but in eye surgery it's huge.

Sometimes what we think of as close enough isn't necessarily so in God's eyes.

And as more than just a few theologians have said --- I think Jesus ---- if He were to walk into many of the churches in North America today --- would flip over a few tables and drive a few things out of our sanctuaries and our lives.

When Jesus looks down on the church --- when Jesus looks down on our lives --- my life --- your life --- our lives --- how do you think He feels?

Do you think He's filled with delight --- do you think He's upset --- is He frustrated --- is He disappointed ---- is he filled with Joy ---- delighted ---- elated ----- is He somewhere between all of these --- a bit of all of these depending on the day?

Those at the Temple courts in John's Gospel today --- had no clue Jesus was about to do what He did --- they figured they were just doing what was necessary ----- required.

And in a way they were ---- only it had gotten a bit too far disproportionate for God's liking --- so Jesus acts --- and He acts dramatically and decisively.

Part of what this passage reminds us is that we have to guard against being complacent ---- because we may be missing something in the finer details of His will and Word.

The money changers got it mostly right --- they were welcomed and necessary even ---- but they clearly had slid into the category of becoming a hindrance rather than a helping presence ---- otherwise why would Jesus scatter them all about and flip over their tables?

This is one of those incidents in the life of Christ that all four Gospels recount ----- they all remembered this one and wrote it down --- it matters --- here we see a passionate side of Christ we don't often see ---- but clearly is necessary ---- here we see the Christ that holds our very souls in His hands -- -- one not afraid to act boldly when boldness is necessary.

In one bold step ---- Jesus announces that the Temple sacrifice as it existed then is out ---- and He --- Jesus --- is now in.

Like Joshua Bell --- the world famous violist and composer --- playing in the subway station during rush hour in Washington D.C. ----- Jesus had been going unnoticed --- mostly unnoticed.

Unlike Joshua Bell --- who found the whole thing kind of amusing ---- no one recognizing Him despite the fact that was doing something that very few people were capable of --- playing very challenging musical pieces with ease ----- unlike Joshua Bell who was kind of amused ----- Jesus was not amused today in John's Gospel when they failed to recognize Him and what He was doing.

From time to time we all need a bit of a wake up call in the Gospel.

And Lent is the season of the wake up call.

Souls were on the line and Jesus wasn't about to treat what was happening in the Temple Courts as a kind of social experiment gone awry.

And so He stepped in --- and He stepped in in dramatic and decisive fashion --- you can be sure that how things were done in the Temple Courts were far more deliberate and reverent after that day.

Sometimes I wonder what other things Jesus would turn over and scatter if He were among us in body today.

Perhaps He might ask us things like -- are we really giving God our best --- our best time --- in prayer and in His Word --- reading the scriptures day to day.

Perhaps He might ask us are we really being faithful in our givings to God -- - our tithes and offerings.

Are we really honouring God in our homes and in our workplaces and in our lives --- are we putting Him first in our decision making process?

What we chose to watch ---- read --- spend our money on ---- pray about and so on.

God cares too much for us --- God is concerned too much for us ---- God loves us too much not to say something when we get off track.

Jesus did what He did at the temple out of a genuine concern and love for the people.

And He wasn't about to simply let things slide --- He wanted to address the concern of misguided focus head on.

Be ready Jesus preached --- the Kingdom of God is near --- get things in order --- don't wait --- do it now.

Take notice --- be aware is a re-occurring theme time and time again in the Gospel.

Lent is all about a keen awareness of what is about to happen --- the great sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

Lent is all about us seeing in the very actions of Christ His deep and profound love for us ---- as He walks to Jerusalem --- sets things right ---- and ushers in a new way of being that altered the course of history forever in a final and decisive way on the cross.

Lent is the season in the church year that is all about self examination.

Lent is all about us asking ourselves things like ---- “What is it that I can be doing Lord to line myself up more and more with your will ---- is something I need to stop Lord ---- is there something I need to start Lord ---- you know Lord ---- tell me please tell me.”

And the answer God gives will be different for each of us.

Pray more --- God might say to one of us.

Spend less time on the computer ---- in front of the TV or in your interests and be with your children instead --- or be with your aging mother --- or your struggling neighbour or co-worker ---- or whomever ---- God will let us know if we ask and seek His direction.

God might say to some of us ---- spend less money on your interests and give back to me more.

But if we ask --- we better be ready to listen.

And if we listen we better be ready to act.

And we better be ready to pay attention to the details --- Numbers 20 and John 2 place particular emphasis on the details.

God will do whatever it is He has to do get our attention --- in John today it was overturning tables --- in Numbers it was letting Moses know why he wouldn't ever enter into the Promised Land.

It's a beautiful and life giving thing when God asks for our attention and then seizes it.

I have been reading scripture and hearing God's voice through the Word in my life lately like never before --- I've read the Bible cover to cover a number of times in my life ---- but I am noticing things in His Word that I have never noticed before --- He's got my attention.

What about you?

Jesus is not a happy camper unless He's got your attention --- our undivided attention.

God is not happy with us unless He's got our attention --- our undivided attention.

How are we showing God that He's got our attention?

“Lord I'm here --- speak to me.” --- is one simple way we can show God he's got our attention --- think of Samuel --- “Speak Lord for your servant is listening.” --- he said when God was working at communicating with him.

Lent is a wonderful time to turn to God and say something like ----- “Hey God I know you're doing something wonderful and awesome and life changing as Jesus journeys to the cross --- how can I get in on that journey too --- how can you use me for something wonderful and awesome and beautiful and life changing for you too? --- I'm here Lord --- I'm listening Lord.”

That's what God wants to hear from us ---- “Here I am Lord!”

Have you ever seen a young boy ---- do any and everything within his power to get a girls attention.

Or the other way around --- a girl does everything in her power to get a boys attention.

I used to work cleaning and watching over apartment building pools in Hamilton --- and let me tell you I saw it over and over and over again --- boys doing everything within their power to get girls attention --- and girls doing everything within their power to get boys attention --- we've all seen this in the school yard --- at work --- in our lives --- we've all participated in it to at some point

When those whose attention we are vying for finally realize it --- something beautiful happens.

Connection --- communion --- love.

God sometimes has to work far harder than He ought to ---- to get our attention.

Jesus had to do something dramatic to get people's attention in the Temple Courts today.

He loves us too much to simply let us keep messing up and missing the point.

Jesus is never happy when we simply trudge along missing the point --- missing the goodness ---- missing the beauty and missing the truth of God's great love for us.

Today as we gather we give thanks to God and we ask Him --- "Hey God --- how can I bring glory to your name and point to you more in my life?"

"How can I give over to you more God?"

You're always there for me God --- you're awesome ---- and great and you're beautiful ----- help me never to take you for granted God --- make all I do be pleasing in your sight.

God loves us and God will do anything for us --- He already has.

Part of Lent is like Jesus in the Temple Courts today driving out all that hinders our growth and corrupts His beautiful vision for us.

It's about getting things together in the right proportions and doing what is pleasing in His sight --- paying attention to details --- hearing His voice.

It's about submitting ourselves before Him in prayer seeking His will and following His lead for our lives.

If we ask God He will always answer.

If we ask God ---- "What do you want me to do about this challenge at work God? --- or ----- "What do you want me to do about this family member and that challenge --- this strained relationship --- that challenging circumstance" ----- and so on.

If we ask God will answer.

Jesus was unhappy in John's Gospel today because God no longer occupied the central location at the Temple ---- in people's hearts.

Too many other things were encroaching upon the central space God was meant to occupy.

So Jesus pushed aside and overturned --- and drove out ---- any and everything that vied for God's rightful central space in the life of the Israelites.

May God continue to be central in our lives --- may God occupy centre stage.

May He be all that matters ---- as we live our lives ---- gather in His name --- celebrate His goodness ----- and share His saving love.

May we sense His presence in our lives in the details --- may we pay attention when it is He who calls us.

May He be our light --- our live ---- our beacon ---- and our guide.

May he be the only one at whose feet we fall --- in praise ---- adoration ---- and complete surrender.

Amen