

Church Mart

Texts: I Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22
Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church – March 7, 2021
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It is a long journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. It is an arduous task to gather together the family and the supplies and the luggage and the animals and the things that we need in order to make this trip. I kind of wish we could have left my mother-in-law at home. All she does is moan and complain about everything I do on this trip. And then, as we travel, it is the same thing every year. “Father, are we there yet? How much longer? I am going to die if I have to ride on this horse for much longer. I have to go to the bathroom. Father, she is touching me again. Tell her to stop! Dear, I think we are lost. Why not stop and ask for directions?” And the traffic and the crowds. It is all just too much.

And you know what we realized this year? We forgot our sacrifice. And then, the wife and I got into an argument as to whose responsibility it was to remember to bring it. I say that she told me she had taken care of it. Yet, she tells me that she never handles that part of the responsibility – that is my job and my job only. I do not know what we are going to do. For what is the point of even traveling all this way to Jerusalem and to the Temple if there is no sacrifice to offer?

Oh, but wait. That is right. I can just purchase something in the Temple gift shop. They sell all kinds of animals and birds and things that we need in order to celebrate a holy and sacred Passover. How convenient! How wonderful! I wonder if they take credit cards or if I will have to get some denarii for the purchase.

Our family arrives in Jerusalem after an exhausting journey. We get settled and then head over to the Temple to check things out. It is hustling and bustling. So many

people. So much activity. But wait. What is going on over there? There is a man yelling and hollering at everyone. Did He just flip that table over? There are birds flying everywhere, coins all over the ground, animals being driven out. People angry and upset, shaking their fist at this man. However, He does not seem to care. He is telling them that they have made this holy place nothing but a shopping mall. What are we to do now?

Perhaps it was a very real situation for the people to travel as lightly as they could and then purchase the necessary items when they got to the Temple. Does that really seem all that odd, especially to us today? Convenience. One stop shopping. Making it easier on the family.

However, that was not how Jesus saw it. For Him, it had become less about the religious observance and more about making a buck – or a denarius or two – and dishonoring that holy space. I am sure that the religious leaders thought they were doing a good thing in allowing the sale of items in the Temple, but Jesus knew that it was destructive to the faith. This is why Jesus reacted so emphatically. “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 the tables. To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!’”

Jesus goes on to imply that first it will be the Temple, and then Him. “The Jews then responded to him, ‘What 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.’ They 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.” Foolish people. Foolish leaders. Would they learn and understand how wrong this was? Would they

learn and understand what was truly important when they were in the presence of the Lord in His temple?

This single Scripture is one that the church as a whole has agonized over time and time again. This is one that the Boards of churches have considered down over the years. What is right and what is wrong? What should be allowed in church and what should not? How far is too far when it comes to convenience and going from faithful to faithless? When is the Church – our Heavenly Father’s house – nothing but a mere marketplace? When have we taken our focus off the presence of our God in the sanctuary – whether it be the sanctuary here in the church building or your sanctuary space at home while in Zoom worship? Surely, there are times when each of us has gotten it right and times when we should have had our tables – and our lives – overturned.

The Good News for the disciples and the followers of Jesus in the Temple on that day is that Christ will ultimately be victorious. The disciples did not realize it then, but had that “A-Ha” moment after Christ had risen from the dead. “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.” The crowd did not understand His words, for they were looking for a sign of what was to come. Here was Jesus, though, standing in front of them proclaiming this word and being that sign.

Our first Scripture affirms those who look elsewhere for their faith. “Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.” But God’s foolishness is wiser than humankind and God’s weakness is stronger than humankind’s strength.

In other words, friends, God knows what is best, even if we think God is foolish. God guided and directed the ministry of the early church, and He continues to guide and direct all that we do here. He is in control. Christ was, is, and always will be the head of the church – the beginning of our faith. And we need only look to Him for our wisdom and our strength.

Sometimes, though, as we have seen this morning in the Gospel lesson, things need to be questioned and shaken up and overturned, even to the very core of what is being done. That is what Jesus was doing, and had the religious leaders opened their eyes, they would have seen the error of their ways and been given another chance to correct their mistakes. Similarly, I believe that if something we are doing as the church is out of line with the will of God, Jesus will shake things up here. Jesus will open our eyes and give us the opportunity to make it right – to make it faithful.

Because, as we have seen both in our own lives and in the Gospel, God demands respect and reverence and our undying commitment in all things. We must acknowledge Christ as the Head of this congregation and do things according to His will and not our own. Let us make this place our Father's house and our hearts free from clutter and the unnecessary. Let us pray...

Loving and merciful God, we want to be faithful in all that we do here. We want to do the things that are pleasing in Your sight. Guide us, we pray, to make decisions that are in accord with Your will and plan. And, Lord, shake us up - overturn our lives - when we need to change directions. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.