

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 14, 2018

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 466, 249, 4, 138:1-4, 235:1.

Lessons: 1 Kings 8:10-30, Colossians 2:6-3:4, Mark 11:1-19.

Sermon Text: John 2:13-22.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

This is one of the earliest history lessons from the ministry of Jesus we find recorded in the Scriptures. We find that most Bible scholars place this lesson immediately after Jesus' first miracle, when he changed water into wine at a wedding in Cana, shortly after he called his first disciples to follow him.

Today we see that

JESUS COMES TO THE TEMPLE

- 1. He chases the merchants out of the temple and reminds the people that it is God's house and**
- 2. He gives prophecy of his death and his resurrection.**

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.” Remember the temple and its courts – we would probably call them “courtyards” – surrounding it. When we think of a temple we usually think of a building like our churches which people go into to worship.

The temple was the place where God made his presence known on earth, as you heard in our Old Testament lesson: *“And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.”* 1 Kings 8:11 (NIV)

The temple in Jesus' time is actually the third temple the Jews had built. The first temple was built by Solomon, whom God had directly commissioned to build it. His father David wanted to build a temple so that the Lord was not worshiped in a tent – the tabernacle, but because David was a man of war, God had his son Solomon build it according to God's direct instructions and specifications.

In Old Testament history, many of God's chosen people and especially their wicked kings totally disrespected and profaned the temple again and again. As a result, God permitted pagans to raid and destroy the temple before carrying them into captivity in Babylon.

The second temple was built by Zerubbabel after the return from captivity.

The third temple was built by wicked king Herod the Great – the one who murdered the infant boys at Bethlehem – who didn't really do it to the glory of God. This temple was similar to the previous two temples but archaeologists suggest that it had a much larger courtyard around it. The temple was very much like the tabernacle. The temple itself was only about 90 feet by 30 feet, and its two rooms inside – the holy of holies and the holy sanctuary were 30 by 30 feet and 30 feet by 60 feet. These rooms were reserved or dedicated for the use of the priests. Jewish people would have been outside the temple building, in “the temple courts”. This would be the area where they would pray, worship, and bring the required sacrifices that would be burned on the altar outside the temple but inside the area where people were to worship.

Archaeologists have reported that even outside the area called “the temple courts” was another area, called “the courtyard of the Gentiles” that for Herod's temple may have been four or five times the size of the courtyard reserved for Jews. They suggest that the total area of the temple and all its courtyards would have been about the size of 25 modern football fields.

These courts or courtyards, possibly the “inner court” which included areas called “the priests court”, are the place where Jesus ***“found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.”***

After the Jews as a nation rejected Jesus Christ as the Savior, God even permitted the total destruction of the temple about 40 years after Jesus’ crucifixion.

Many, perhaps most, Jews would not have come to celebrate the Passover dragging their sacrificial animals with them. In addition, many Jews would have come from their home countries with foreign money. The Old Testament made very specific demands about the money – the Jewish shekel – to be given to God and the animals required for sacrifices.

So Jews from afar would have to exchange their foreign money for the correct coins to meet their Passover obligations. They also would have to purchase sacrificial animals once they got to Jerusalem.

So although the men selling animals and exchanging money were doing the pilgrims a service, they were doing it in a place which should have been a place for worship and prayer.

But, and this is the reason for Jesus actions, they were doing this in the holy place – the house of the Lord. ***“So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables.”*** They had made it into a place of business, a market, a house of merchandise, a house of trade, to use other English translations of this verse.

The message of the sanctity of the temple is the heart of this message of our text.

“To those who sold doves he said, ‘Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!’” Even these who sold the smallest animals – the doves – were rebuked and driven out by Jesus.

Our place of worship may be much more informal than the temple area where Jews were commanded to worship. We are not bound by the Old Testament worship laws which we call the “ceremonial laws” of God’s Old Testament people. Because Christ has completely and fully kept all of God’s laws for us, in our place, you heard in our Epistle lesson: ***“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”*** Colossians 2:16-17 (NIV) John records ***“His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”***, words which are found in Psalm 69.

Yet our place of worship is just that. It is the house of the Lord, and we must remember to consider and treat it respectfully. Most importantly, we are to give God the greatest respect. That is part of the moral law, for example, the First Commandment: You shall have no other gods. Luther explains that this way: We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Misusing his place of worship is not loving God above all things.

And it is obvious from Jesus’ actions and words that these merchants, these merchandisers were not honoring God more than their own pocketbooks and bank accounts.

Christ’s church on earth must take great care not to fall into the trap of money-making. Because of the structure of businesses today – including the activities of a congregation, a visible church, the church must be involved in certain business activities, and expenses like utility bills, buying or renting property, salaries, and all the expenses of a congregation. We have been very careful not to make our church a place of business. Although many fund-raising organizations approach churches to help them raise money for their expenses or other causes, we have avoided such schemes to raise money. We have struggled to make all our gifts to the church just that: offerings and gifts from the heart. We do not want people to think that they must buy the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The shameful history of indulgences in the Roman Catholic Church must always be a warning for us.

We must never forget the first role, the primary calling of the church – to preach the gospel. German Christians had a two-word phrase which translates to the idea that we must have a religion that emphasizes the other side of death, not this side of death. They said that true Christianity must be a “jenseits religion”. (yain’sites)

All that the church does on earth must be subservient to its eternal, heavenly, God-given mission of bringing souls to Christ. And that involves bringing God’s law and the true Gospel to mankind so that fruits of faith may then spring forth in the life of the Christian.

After Jesus chased the merchants out of the temple area, John records ***“the Jews demanded of him, ‘What miraculous 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.’ The Jews 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. 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 Jews were astounded that this man would take upon himself the authority to do this, to upset the tables of the merchants and drive them out.

As a result of Jesus’ words, there arose confusion about which temple Jesus was talking about. Did Jesus actually physically point to his body when he spoke these words? John does not record any such thing. But John does assure us ***“the temple he had spoken of was his body.”***

But this emphasizes again the message Jesus was giving when he threw the money-changers and the sellers of livestock out of the temple. Eternal life does not depend on a temple, or on sacrifices of animals or mere human obeying Old Testament laws to earn salvation. Eternal life comes only through faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior from sin. The Psalmist wrote: ***“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*** Psalm 51:16-17 (NIV)

At Jesus’ trial before the leaders of the Jews, Mark reports that ***“Many testified falsely against him, but their statements did not agree. Then some stood up and gave this false testimony against him: ‘We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” Yet even then their testimony did not agree.”*** Mark 14:56-59 (NIV) In such a trial every single word of accusation had to be a direct word-for-word quotation and the words of witnesses must totally agree.

“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.”

To draw all this together today we must remember the role of the church. The church on earth is to proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified. Jesus was crucified for our sins and the sins of all mankind. Then he rose from the grave on the third day.

May we realize today the importance of Jesus’ mission and our own roles as members of the visible church on earth. We are called to ***“Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.”*** Mark 16:15 (NIV) God, give us all the will and strength to tell others about you! Amen.