



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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March 15, 2009
3rd Sunday in Lent
John 2:13-22
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 20:1-17
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 69
Second Lesson: Romans 8:1-10
Gospel: John 2:13-22

Jesus is Still Zealous for God's House

His zeal for the place God lived

His zeal for the place God lives

I'm sure you all know people that if you get them on a certain topic they can go and go and go and talk and talk and talk, right? Maybe with someone you know it's cars. If you say anything about cars, they'll tell you more about a carburetor than you ever really wanted to know. They'll tell you about the size of their engine. They'll tell you about its horse power. Meanwhile, all you're thinking is "I know where the gas pedal is and it works whether I know that stuff or not."

Maybe it's some sports team. You mention the sports team and they can go on and on and on about seventh round draft choices, 40-yard times and various things that don't matter to a hill of beans.

There are things that all of us are zealous about. We are consumed with zeal, and we'll talk about them. Some of them are great things to talk about; our work, our life, our family, our children. Maybe some things aren't as important as all those.

In the Gospel that I just read to you from John, it says flat out zeal for God's house consumed Jesus. You see it in the actions he did that day, at the beginning of his ministry. And he repeated the same thing toward the end of his ministry. But the other thing we need to remind ourselves of today is that zeal for God's house still consumes Jesus to this very day, the place where God has chosen to live. And that's a very interesting thing to think about which has implications for your daily life and my daily life.

But the zeal is not hard to see early in Jesus' ministry. At the first of the three Passover celebrations during his three-year public ministry, he comes up to Jerusalem at that time when he is going to go and celebrate the Passover. He comes into the temple and gets to the court of the Gentiles, the large court that anyone could go in, and he found people doing things that were necessary to do. If you came from a distance to offer sacrifices, you probably didn't drive along a herd to offer as a sacrifice when you got there, right? If you had to pay the temple tax and you came from a distance where there was money that was different than was used for paying the temple tax, you had to change your money. You had to do all of these things. It was a necessary thing that needed to be done. But for the court of the Gentiles, Gentiles could go no farther in that courtyard. They couldn't go into the court of the Jews or into the court of the men or the deeper

places of how the temple of Jesus' day was set up. So for them, here was the place where they were supposed to be singing their psalms of anticipation, offering their prayers to God and doing these various things, and as they walked through it, I'm betting these guys were probably holding their purses with one hand and holding their noses with the other because all these animals in there had to bring about a big stink, right? And all these people that were selling their various wares probably had to compete against each other, so I'm betting they were kind of loud trying to get people's attention. What they were doing was useful, but it was distracting from the worship that God had intended to take place for those who were not born into the children of Israel.

So Jesus, consumed with zeal that all people would know him, I imagine grabbed some cords from some animals that had been sold and tied up and slaughtered, made them into a whip and started turning over tables, shoving cages full of doves into their owners and said "Get these all out of here! You've turned my Father's house not into a place of worship but into something else that's distracting from worship and it shouldn't happen!"

This is Jesus' first Passover, so he wasn't as well known as he would later be. This was kind of his way of introduction to some of these people I would guess. So they come up to Jesus and say "What sign will you do to show that you have the authority to do this?" They don't deny that what he is doing is right. They are just asking "What gives you the right?" It's kind of like we do when someone points out our sin. "Who are you to tell me?" We don't deny that what we're doing is sin, but we try to focus on the person that's telling us the message, right? Then we don't have to confront the reality of the wretchedness of our own sin. They are doing the same thing we do.

Jesus tells them about a sign, a sign that they think he is nuts and must have tipped one of those tables over on his own head. "Destroy this temple and in three days I'll raise it up again." That's nuts. Herod's temple had taken 46 years and there still was construction going on at the time of Jesus in various outlying parts of it. It was a beautiful edifice. Not near the glory of Solomon's temple, but it was still a beautiful edifice none the same. It had been expanded. The temple courts had been expanded under Herod to make it what it had become. It had been going on and on for longer than most of those people had been alive, longer than Jesus had been alive, and he says "Destroy it in three days." But like he had often said, "Let those that have ears hear," and if you don't have the ears of faith, you can't hear what Jesus is talking about. So they had no idea what Jesus was talking about. Even his disciples didn't get it until later on when they saw Jesus alive again after he had risen from the dead. Then they realized what he was talking about. This was the sign – dead and alive.

You see his zeal for his house. You see it in his actions. You see it in his words. It's pretty straightforward. It's the fulfillment of the Psalm we sang today. Did you notice how much of that Psalm applied to Jesus the Messiah? Did you focus on the words, or were you too busy complaining in your own head "this is a Psalm tone I don't know. I can't sing it." If you did, you cheated yourself, didn't you? Beautiful words about who God is and what God would do written a thousand years before Jesus did these things.

So the question then becomes zeal for God's house? That temple is gone. What is God's house that Jesus is still zealous for today? If you paid attention to the words of our opening hymn, I suppose you would think of the church building where we gather to worship. That's how the opening hymn depicted God is in his temple, right?

Well, the Old Testament temple, the temple of Jesus' day is where God caused his name to dwell is how it was described in Scripture. He caused his name to dwell as the glory of the Lord would come down and fill the holy of holies. So I guess a question today you would ask yourself is where does God cause his name to dwell?

Well my dear Christian friends, what's the answer? For we who are Christians, doesn't God cause his name to dwell in us? Christian – little Christ – doesn't God tell us through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in 1 Corinthians that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you? "You are not your own. You were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body." I would say that God is still incredibly zealous today for his house, the place where he causes his name to dwell, and that would be you and me and every other Christian in this world. He is incredibly zealous for us. He wants to be a part of our life. He wants to be in constant contact with us, strengthening us, encouraging us, lifting us up when we fall, assuring us of forgiveness when we have sinned, strengthening us when we are weak and when we doubt. And he does that through Word and Sacrament.

Lent is a time where God is serious about sin. We heard the Ten Commandments this morning. We saw how the law is the law of death. It cannot bring life, that's what our Second Lesson told us. It is only God in his Gospel that brings us to life is what our Second Lesson told us. And he brings us to life through that Word and that Sacrament. The question I think we would do well to ask ourselves as we consider Jesus' zeal for us is that if he showed up today and wanted to sit down with us across a table and said "Let's go over your life. Let's see where I need to make a whip and drive some things out of your life." What would those things be? What are the things that you and I do that distract us from focusing on worship of God, getting to know God better, his Word and his Sacrament? Wasn't that the problem with the money changers' table? They distracted from getting to know God better, from offering to him worship and praise, from focusing on his Word.

Are there things in your life and in my life that do that? Do we find time for a lot of other things that we're zealous about that are pretty well meaningless as far as it comes to eternity? If Jesus sat down and went over a checklist of your life, what would he tell you? "You know what? This isn't helping you at all. I'm zealous for you. I lived and died for you. I have a love for you that goes beyond all understanding. You are chasing your tail here. This is a waste of your time."

That's kind of an interesting exercise. Maybe we should pull up a chair to a table and have an empty chair sitting across from us and act like its Jesus and say "Okay Lord. What would you have me get out of my life, the things that are the sins that are leading me away from you? What are the things that are distracting me so I don't focus on

you?” You don’t have to go home and make a whip out of cords and start hitting yourself with it. But that sure would be a beneficial exercise, wouldn’t it? You and I get distracted by a lot of things.

God has called us men who are here today to be leaders in our families. Are you leading your family deeper into God’s Word? Or is the only time your children ever hear you talk about God’s name is when you put a “damn it” on the end of it? Do they see you in the Bible? Do they get in the Bible with you? We make a lot of time to teach life’s lessons to our children. Teach them one by your actions that show God is important to you. It’s probably the greatest legacy my father gave to me. He didn’t give me the impression that God’s stuff is Mom’s work. He gave me the impression, from as long as I can remember that God’s work is Dad’s work. And he lived it.

You and I fail in many areas at many times and in many ways. We make time for things that don’t bring us closer to God. In fact, we make time for things that lead us farther away from God. And when we realize that and when God, in that empty chair across the table from us, points out all the things that should be driven out of our life, we have a couple of options, don’t we? We can make excuses and say “Yeah, but at least I’m not doing what Joe Blow over there is doing.” Or we can say “Yeah, but I’m doing better than I used to.” Or we can simply say “Lord, you are right. I have sinned. Forgive me.”

This is the beauty that we have as Christians. We don’t have to make excuses. We say “Lord, forgive me.” And we know that the zeal for his house that would take the time to point out to us our sins so that we might turn away from them and get closer to him, we know that he has taken away those sins. We know that the one who drove people out of the temple that were distracting from worship is the same one who gave that sign, who lived in our place and then died in our place and then rose again so that you and I might be absolutely certain that our sins are paid for. That’s what his zeal did. His zeal is not just to punish. His zeal was what our Second Lesson talked about – to take the punishment you and I deserve on himself so that now we know he has forgiven us for these things and now we want to do them more. Not “Oh, now I don’t have to” or “God will forgive me anyhow so I can just do whatever I want and chase my own tail as long as I want to.”

God changes us. The zeal he has for us that led him to put our interest ahead of his own changes us. It makes us into what he wants us to be. He gives us what he demands. And what he demands of us is perfect love. And he gives us this love by leading us to believe that he lived and died for us.

But after you and I believe, now we can chose to either spend time getting to know him better or spend time doing something else. When we focus on what we were and what God has made us, when we focus on the depth of his love and the depth of our sin, we see what God has made us. We see that Jesus has brought us from death to life, from darkness to light. And we see that we want to live in the light of this life. So we find ways to make his Word important, to make his worship important. We look beyond our wants and needs and desires and what we prefer and focus on God. And any way that

leads me to know God better is something that is good for me. Then the zeal for his house, for you and for me, that consumes Jesus begins to fill us more and more and more. And we struggle against sin in our Lenten struggles. We might fall, but we go right back to his zeal that has taken away our sins. We renew the battle again because now his zeal consumes us.