

John 2:13-22
Lent 2 – Year B
March 4, 2018

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and from God our Creator!

The Jewish people often get portrayed in a negative manner within John's gospel but in our passage this morning we see a people of extreme faith, conviction, and desire to be in relationship with their God as they journeyed day and night, mile after mile, through the dust, heat, and dangerous situations that may have presented themselves along the way to the Temple in Jerusalem. Thousands upon thousands of people came to partake of the Passover festival – an annual celebration recounting God's saving actions of Israel's escape from slavery at the hands of Egypt. And upon arrival, as was required for sacrifice, the faithful people needed an animal. Coming so far it simply was not feasible to bring their cattle, sheep, or doves along with them. Thus, within the confines of the Temple area were people selling the required animals for sacrifice. In addition were tables to exchange the various coins bearing images of the Emperor, also forbidden in the Torah, for plain Temple coins to purchase the animals; often with a surcharge added that was so exorbitant it excluded the poor from encountering God in that place as was customary to do.

Jesus, himself a devout Jew, entered into the Temple, the place where God dwelled, observed what was going on, and quickly lashed out at the money changers and those selling the animals, overturned their tables, and shouted, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Jesus saw something all the others were not seeing or had little power to change. At this time, the Temple was in Roman hands. Yes, the Roman government allowed the Jewish people to observe their faith; however, make no mistake they

saw an opportunity to increase their own coffers and appointed Temple authority and leaders who made certain that happened.

So, while we have a passage about Temple worship we also have a very politically charged message. Time and time again Jesus confronts the powers of his day be they religious or governmental. The gospel itself is political and in our text today Jesus essentially stages a protest. He knows to challenge the system in place would bring about grave consequences and potentially death. With those coming to the temple having little to no voice to change the situation, Jesus speaks and act. He questions the ruling authority to which he gets a question back in the form of by what authority gives him the right to come into their temple and behave in the manner he has just displayed. He responds by saying, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." What an absurd answer as the temple authority remind Jesus and those gathered this structure took 46 years to build. How in the world could he rebuild it in 3 days? Of course, they can't comprehend who Jesus is and what he has come to do. They can't grasp he is the new Temple, the true presence and revelation of God, and He will be the true paschal lamb through His death and resurrection. His blood will be the cleansing sacrifice for the sin of the world. His dead body will be raised to new life after three days in the tomb.

John does something interesting with this story, which is located in all 4 gospels. While Matthew, Mark and Luke place this story at the end of their gospels after Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we call Palm Sunday, setting the stage for what is to come. That is, Jesus will be scene and charged with being an insurrectionist and therefore sentenced to death literally carrying his cross out of love for those help captive not only to sin and death but also to oppressive regimes and ruling authorities. John; however, places this story in the second

chapter following Jesus' first miracle at the wedding in Cana in which transformed water into wine. Why the change John?

Perhaps, the answer lies in the testimony John the Baptist gives in the first chapter about Jesus, the One who is coming after him, yet the One who has been with God since the beginning of time and truly is God. John the Baptist, states, "from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace; as the Law was given through Moses, so grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ." Grace upon grace. Those words just kind of stick with you as you read the gospel of John and John's audience and community needed those words. You see their Temple had just been demolished at the hands of the Roman government. Now what? Where do they worship? Where do they encounter God? And then they hear these words. Recall, this morning's gospel passage ends by telling us that following Jesus' resurrection the disciples recalled his words and believed the words he had spoken. I envision that is part of John's though process in moving this passage to the beginning. Just as he was able to transform water into wine so is he able to transform a temple of brick and mortar into the temple of his body.

Right from the very beginning John recalls these words. Their temple may lay in rubble; yet the new temple of Jesus' body has been raised and he is where they encounter God. Grace upon grace. This is good news. They are not alone. God has not abandoned them. Do not lose hope or fall into despair; but rather, live in the grace God has revealed through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Grace in this passage is often not how I have read and interpreted it. Trying to overcome the image of Jesus acting out of righteous anger may cloud our vision of truly seeing it. Yet, it is there and maybe John placing it where he does, at the beginning, and understanding

what his community was going through opens the door into a new way of seeing that grace revealed. Perhaps, we need to have Jesus clear away those things that limit our ability to see this grace; whatever, they may be. Is this not what Lent is about? Confessing of the many ways we have turned from God, erected barriers that get in the way of our relationship with God and with our neighbor, and then seeking the grace of God in Jesus Christ to come and clear those away so we can once again be freed and restored to right relationship with him. So we once again see grace upon grace in those places, spaces, and people we may not have previously seen. Amen.