

Sermon for the Third Sunday in Lent, 19.iii.2006, 10:00 a.m.
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania
Holy Eucharist, LBW Setting 2
Exodus 20:1-7; Psalm 19; I Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was and
Who is to come! ✠ Amen.



Ur Lord Jesus Christ was universally remembered by
the Early Church as having claimed authority over God's
Temple in Jerusalem, as having spoken a clear word about the
purpose of that holy house and, by logical extension, about the
purpose of any house erected for the worship of the living God.
My prayer today is that we hear that sharp word of judgment,
but that we hear in that word also a word of Gospel, of Good
News, and word about a promise our gracious God intends to

according to Saint Mark, then in Matthew, then in Luke, the three Synoptic Gospels:

Mark 11:17

“And He taught them, and said to them: ‘Is it not written, MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL THE NATIONS? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

Matthew 21:13

“He said to them: ‘It is written, MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER; but you have made it a den of robbers.”

Luke 19:46

[He said to them:] “It is written: MY HOUSE SHALL BE A HOUSE OF PRAYER, but you have made it a den of robbers.”

The length of Our Lords’ earthly life could have been measured in hours and minutes after He did what He did and said what He said. All of the Synoptic Evangelists place the Cleansing of the Temple at the very end of Jesus’ life and

estimated four generations of them, place it near the very *beginning* of the story of Jesus. They did so, not because it *happened* at the beginning— which would have been impossible— but because this was among the most *important* of all the things Jesus did and said, not a miracle, not a long sermon or discourse, but this . . . sharp . . . word! That word is sharpest of all in John’s telling, for there Jesus does not *quote* Scripture; He simply *speaks* Scripture, for He *is* the Word of God in our humanity:

***“He told those who were selling the doves,
‘Take these things out of here! Stop making
my Father’s house a marketplace!”***

--John 2:16

‘MY FATHER’S house!’ Professor Paul Frederiksson comments that there would have been no shortage of

acknowledged King David's insistence on Mount Zion as the center of the LORD's presence and the right place for sacrifice. They still worshipped on Mount Gerizim and in the open-air hill shrines of old— and they still *do*. But the Galileans and the Judæans were totally focused on Jerusalem and the Temple. They had all been there, at one time or other. They all knew what went on there, as had their ancestors. Their sacrifices had helped to rebuild and to improve the Temple. It was the *Beth Am*, the 'House of the People.' King Herod had made it his pet project, perhaps the only decent thing he accomplished in his entire corrupt lifetime, so that the Third Temple was called with some justice, 'Herod's Temple.' It was the one part of Israel on which the Roman's boot of occupation had not trod, that one piece of religious and national identity the Roman's promised

Temple was their common responsibility. Was it the LORD's House? Yes. It was '*OUR God's House,*' the House of God '*OUR Father.*' We, the people of God, have both the responsibility and the *right* to make whatever arrangements we must for the maintenance and the security of that Holy House, do we not?

And that is exactly what the money-changers and the sellers of various grains and animals for sacrifice were doing. They were doing it not only that day, but also on the *first* day Jesus arrived at the Temple. On that day Our Lord made a much gentler entrance, in the tender arms of His Blessed Mother, brought there by good Joseph, caring for his little family as faithfully as the best of shepherds. No matter what they might say about Mary and the Baby when they returned to Nazareth,

God's Law. But then and there in the Temple, there was no worship and no dedication without sacrifice. Because they were poor, Joseph and Mary could only afford the sacrifice of the poor, two turtle doves, as Saint Luke tells us (Luke 2:21ff). I wonder if those who sold them those two gentle animals noticed anything special about the couple and their child? I doubt that either the sellers or their customers in the forecourt of the Temple that day had even the slightest idea that they were doing anything wrong, for, given their context, they were not.

And neither did the poor souls who happened to be at their posts in the day Jesus arrived at the Temple for His last visit. I am sure that they had not the slightest idea of what hit them when the Angry Man appeared, whip in hand, upsetting their legitimate and charitable enterprise. But what He said had

forgotten that there *is* a *living* God, not just a memory from antiquity, and that that Holy House was *His*, not just a shrine to the ancestors or to the national pride? *We* are certainly prone to forget that, amid our endless chatter, our ceaseless drone and din above which we cannot hear ourselves pray, perhaps because we have forgotten to.

And they needed to be reminded that the Temple, every stone and brick, every plank and beam in it, every work of art and skill, belonged now not to those by whose hands it was made but to Him to Whom it was dedicated. The LORD of Israel had not asked them to build Him a House, but He accepted the gift they offered as long as His people remained *His* people, serving goodness and justice in the world. Yet, the God Jesus claims as *His* Father had already proven Himself unique among all the

this time to raise a new and everlasting Temple in the human flesh and blood of His own and only Son, the angry young man with the whip in His hand, in the hand that also welcomed children and healed the broken of body, mind and heart, the hand that welcomes us to be the Church.

How worried *we* can become— how worried *we* at this very moment in fact *are*--that *we* might *lose* this Holy House into which present and former generations have poured so much time and treasure, forgetting that it is not ours, but *His*, forgetting that, as we have died through our Baptism into Christ, we have this and all else in this life only on loan, only as long as we are passing through on the way to His Father, *Our* Father in Him alone. God help us and God forgive us, out of our anxiety and our little faith we just *might* make some really *wrong*

Never forget that the tragic split of the Reformation was caused almost entirely by a really bad idea in the area of fundraising.

But the Good News is— remember I said at the beginning that there would be *Good News* in today's Gospel?— the *Good News* is that, no matter how bad a mess Christians make of trying to help and protect the Church, the Lord of the Church will always enter stage right or left, blind-siding us if we are not looking for Him, upsetting our tables of routine, reminding us that *this* house is not just *any* house, correcting any mistakes we may have made. *This Holy House is Our Father's House.* It is for *prayer*. It is *for all people*, and so it shall remain! ✍️ **Amen.**



Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and

S. D. G. !