

## “Cleaning House” – Pr Jim Sprengle, February 24, 2021

- I. **Mark 11:15-19** – As Jesus clears the temple
- II. **Our text for today takes place on Monday of Holy Week.**
  - a. Of course we celebrate the day before, Palm Sunday, as we hold palm leaves or fronds in our hands and sing in our processional...
  - b. Jesus got a hero's welcome when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.
  - c. The people were yelling, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mt 21:9).
  - d. It's interesting though, because in Mark 11:11 (just before our reading today) it gives us a hint of what is to come... “[Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve” (Mk 11:11).
    - i. It doesn't say what He was thinking, but obviously whatever He saw didn't sit well, because the next day, Monday of Holy Week, Jesus took significant action.
- III. **Have you ever been to an event that tried to profit off you?**
  - a. I grew up in a ski town, and if you didn't bring a lunch with you, the cost of food and drink in the lodge was ridiculous.
  - b. Many of you have attended sporting events, and stadiums don't hesitate to charge exorbitant prices for hot dogs, burgers, nachos and drinks.
  - c. Or maybe you've gone to a concert or festival in a remote area and the only place to get food and water was the vendors that charged way too much.
  - d. I remember going to Disney World with the family, and every time we tried to find lunch or just something to drink, it felt like we were being gouged.
  - e. I admit, the thought crossed my mind to express my displeasure at the high prices at these events... but Jesus goes much further – and for a much better reason.
    - i. Jesus went into the temple court the day after He got to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, and He forced the people who were taking advantage of the situation to get out.
    - ii. In righteous anger, He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.... And using the words of Isaiah (Isaiah 56:7), Jesus says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17).
  - f. This event always gets us to think about the full range of emotions that Jesus showed in His earthly life.
    - i. We mostly think He was a kind, gentle person with lots of love and empathy... but this is not the mild version of our Savior!
  - g. What got Jesus so riled up and offended that He would take this kind of significant action?

- i. This particular week was the Passover festival, which the Jews celebrated every year by God's command.
- ii. They remembered how God delivered them out of the slavery and bondage in Egypt.
- iii. Thousands of Jews would come to Jerusalem to celebrate.
  - 1. And because so many of them traveled long distances to get there, it wasn't practical to bring the animals they needed for the sacrifice at the temple.
  - 2. Of course, those who lived near the temple always had plenty of the right animals to buy... at a markup.
  - 3. It is reported that the priests of the temple were getting some kickbacks from these sales... and even requiring people to buy their sacrifices at the temple so they could make money.
- iv. In addition, when you get to a new country or area, you have to exchange your foreign dollars for the local money.
  - 1. Just like when we traveled from Guatemala to Honduras, the money-changers were right there at the border, trying to get every person to offload their quetzals for lempiras – at a bad exchange rate so they could profit off of unsuspecting tourists.
  - 2. Well, the pilgrims to Jerusalem needed to pay the temple tax with local currency... and were scammed by terrible exchange fees by the money-changers.
- h. God, and the whole point of the Passover Feast, became an afterthought because people were trying to make a buck.
- i. Here's the worst part... as Jesus quotes Isaiah, it says this temple is to be a house for all the nations.
  - i. The temple had a specific area (a men's and women's sections) for Jews... and the large outer court was for the Gentiles or those outside the Jewish faith
  - ii. If the outside area was all vendors and businesses, how could the Gentiles gather to pray and worship there?

IV. **What Jesus did that day is a warning for us too.**

- a. It goes without saying that finances and money can drive a church to distraction.
- b. We have to be constantly reminded that the mission of God is not so much about fundraising as about Gospel sharing.
- c. Some people look at new members and think they will be able to help the bottom line – the budget... rather than seeing them as God's children.
- d. We can make our budget, our offerings and our bottom line a hindrance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ – and that is a sin.
- e. You see, budgets and offerings are the tools to share Jesus... we don't share Jesus to get the offerings! Again, that is sin.

- f. These kinds of thoughts and behaviors are obstacles to people around us... and even us personally.
    - i. When we feel like we're "under compulsion" (2 Corinthians 9:7) to give, the joy of the Gospel becomes a burden.
    - ii. When we put hoops to jump through and bars to get over in the way of worshiping God, it's time to clean house.
  - g. Overturn those tables and obstacles!
- V. **Jesus wants nothing more than to come to you unhindered.**
- a. In fact, He is willing to go to any length to remove those obstacles.
  - b. It's why He went to took such a significant action at the end of that week.
  - c. He moved on from clearing the temple, and instead He would die in anguish on a cross.
    - i. On that cross He died for all those obstacles we put in front of God.
    - ii. He paid for the greed, the financial distractions, and the lack of trust we have in Him.
    - iii. He broke down the barrier that would keep us separated from God forever... our sin.
  - d. And out of pure grace, God wants you to benefit from that work... He wants you to have what Jesus did.
  - e. By bringing you to faith and on the day of your Baptism, God took significant action in your life...
    - i. He cleared the temple of your body (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19)... He cleaned house... and brought forth a new person – He made you a temple of the Holy Spirit
    - ii. He called you to faith, He washed away your sin, and He claimed you as His child (Isaiah 43:1)
  - f. As you continue in this year's 40 days of purpose, the Lenten journey, each day remember your Baptism and the temple that God cleared out...of all sin and obstacles to His grace... and that temple is YOU. Amen.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sermon based on the sermon series, "Four Significant Days," by Rev. Glen Thomas, STM, DMin, senior pastor, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Des Peres, Missouri