

A SHIFT IN FOCUS

3 Lent – B March 4, 2018

Exodus 20:1-17, Psalm 19,

1 Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22

I have never been fond of reading the story of Jesus “cleansing the Temple” because it portrays an angry Jesus—and that doesn’t sound very much like Good News. That’s particularly true when we read the parallel accounts in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) because Jesus’ act of purging the moneychangers and overturning tables is one of the events precipitating his arrest, crucifixion, and death.

John’s account speaks specifically of Jesus making a whip out of cords, chasing out animals, overturning tables, and yelling at people: “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” But John places the “cleansing” episode at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, right after his changing water to wine at the wedding at Cana. The writer of the fourth gospel is telling us that Jesus’ whole mission and ministry flows out of understanding this event not simply as a purging of shady business practices but rather a sign that peoples’ whole understanding of sacrifice is about to change.

Jesus’ use of the words “my Father’s house” reinforces Jesus’ understanding that he has come—the Word became flesh—to reshape people’s understanding of God, and how they worship and honor God. Overturning the tables, chasing out the money changers and the animals, Jesus tells us that something new is happening.

Pastor David Lose explains concisely and well, revealing the whole theological shift that is taking place in a biblical account that, in John, is pivotal. He writes:

John puts this story upfront because it reveals something crucial about who Jesus is: he is the Lamb of God, as John the Baptist said in the first chapter, who takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29). He is, to return a few verses earlier, the embodiment of “grace upon grace” (1:16). There is therefore no further need for sacrifice; Jesus’ incarnated, embodied grace suffices fully, wholly, entirely, and completely. Keep in mind, the Temple had become a marketplace out of necessity. In order to buy the animals for sacrifice, folks needed to change their Roman coins for Jewish ones and then purchase the proscribed animals. But with Jesus on the scene – the one who embodies abundance having just taken the waters of purification (also no longer needed) and turned them instead into the wine of celebration – there is no need for changing money, for purchasing animals, for making sacrifice...at all or ever again.

[“In the Meantime” for March 3, 2018 at www.davidlose.net]

The idea that *what Jesus does for us is enough* is hard to grasp when we tend to base so much of our worth on effort and accumulation. But the idea that Jesus is forever trying to get across to us (even as he was doing during his earthly ministry) is that God loves us because we belong to him, and not by condition of anything we have done.

We come together as church to remember the sacrifice that ended all sacrifices as we receive the bread and wine: the body and blood of Jesus. We take this Lenten journey to do some cleansing in our own lives, making some attempt to purge the things that get in the way of our relationship with God and with one another. Lent calls us more intimately into Jesus’ journey to the cross, and—along the way—reminds us, in the dust and ashes, of our vulnerabilities. Jesus’ act of

purging was about getting people to comprehend that which was no longer necessary (that is to say, “in the way”) of worship, of hearing God’s word, of feeling God’s presence.

In our Lenten worship, we pare things a bit in worship to get at the center. Think of it as a kind of “spring cleaning” to help us let go, to assist us in getting back to basics.

In today’s readings we got back to basics with the giving of the commandments in this morning’s Exodus passage, in an appreciation for the Creator and God’s handiwork according to the psalmist, in the upside-down logic (“foolishness”) of God’s economy, when judged by the standards and wisdom of this world, and finally in the message that God desires us over anything we can produce or accumulate.

The Good News is the story that is not *about us* as much as it is *for us*. The rest of our Lenten journey will help remind us of the God who acts in order that we receive, the Son of God who gives himself up so that we are freed to offer ourselves up, and the Spirit that binds us to one another for the journey. Amen.