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Lent III
11 March 2012
Grace Lutheran Church, Wichita
Jn 2:13-22

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

With coins clinging and oxen lowing, sheep bleating and Pharisees steaming—
the tables are turned, the whip cracks,
and Jesus, in a rare moment, is furious!

But He's not angry, like we get angry.
When we get angry we sin.
We say things we regret, trying to kill with our words;
we hit and fight and lose our temper,
and thank God others can't tell what we're thinking!
When we're angry, we sin.

But not Jesus.

He's not angry like we get angry,
because for him, his anger isn't from being mistreated or shamed or cheated—
when that comes, He forgives—
no, He's not angry because He's been hurt or harmed,
it's because His Father has.

Our anger boils when *we've* been hurt, when *we've* been offended, or when *we're* treated poorly.
We rarely think twice about someone else being offended,
and especially so with our Father.

Some have called this “righteous anger.”
And that's not a bad way to describe it—
it only goes bad when we start to justify our anger this way.

“Righteous anger” is anger without sin, without thinking for a moment about *me*.
But notice that nowhere in the Gospel for today does the word ‘anger’ ever pop up!

Instead of “anger” we're given to call this “zeal.”
For “***Zeal for Your house consumes Me***” (2:17).

As St. John reflects on what happened that crazy day in the Temple,
with what seemed to be a moment of *un-Christian* behavior,
he realized it was actually just the opposite!
Jesus was fulfilling the Scriptures—
He was the One David foreshadowed,
consumed with zeal for His Father's house.

But why?
That's the big question—why was Jesus so outraged?

Surely He'd been to the Temple before!
 Perhaps Mary and Joseph even bought their turtledoves to sacrifice from these people.
 This wasn't hidden or underground—
 everything was right out in the open,
 it even had the Temple's imprimatur, seal of approval!

They probably paid the Temple tax for their corner of the courtyard,
 they had their permit,
 what's the big deal?

Like most things, I'm sure this began with the best of motives.

You can almost hear the reasoning:
 "Well, with people coming in from all parts of the world, who's gonna keep their lamb
 without blemish all that way?
 We'll provide a service to help those travelling in from who-knows-where."

And what started innocent and well, quickly became a market place,
 a typical business of greed and cheating the system.
 They leaned on the scales and found cheaper sheep,
 they skimmed on quality for the sake of income.

And to this Jesus blurts out:
 "**Do not make My Father's house a house of commerce**" (2:16),
 or more familiar from Matthews Gospel,
 "**a den of thieves**" (Mt 21:13).

And with that rebuke, along with a whip made of cords, Jesus *cleansed* the Temple.

And if that were the end of the story, then our sermon would leave you completely under the law:
 You either don't have the sort of zeal for God's house as you should—
 by not standing up in the face of error, false confession, or hideous immorality—
 or, you're just like those money changers who have lost sight of why you're here.
 Church has become something to check off your list,
 a good work you can pat yourself on the back for,
 or a way of keeping up appearances.

But Church isn't about your works or appearances or to-do lists—
 it's about Christ:
 Who He is and what He's done *for you!*

This house, the Father's house, is the place of forgiveness;
 so you know the story can't end here on the Law—
 not on you and your work and your lack of zeal.
 It must be about Christ and Him restoring the Father's house to a place of forgiveness *for you.*

You see, this Temple was where God promised to be, for His people, for their forgiveness.
And that's what they'd lost sight of.

So to help them remember what the Temple is there for, Jesus literally turned the tables on them!

But who is this Jesus who waltzes into the Temple and causes such a raucous?!

By what *authority* is He given to act this way?

“What sign do you show us for doing these things?” (2:18), they ask.

And this is the kicker: The sign of His zeal is His death and resurrection.

If you want to see how zealous this Jesus is for His Father's house to be the place of forgiveness,
then simply look to the cross.

That's where His zeal takes Him!

His zeal, His anger, doesn't lash out against us, against those who cause so much offense—
no, His anger consumes *Him*—

“Zeal for Your house consumes Me.”

Jesus takes it all to Himself.

He's so obsessed with keeping a place for forgiveness here on earth,
that He gives His life as a ransom for us, *all of us!*

His zeal isn't against sinners, but *for sinners, for you!*

So when Jesus said,

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19),
no one would've imagined He meant Himself.

They looked at the stone walls, the craftsmanship that went into it all, and wondered:

“It's taken us 46 years to build this Temple, and you'll raise it in 3 days?” (2:20).

But Jesus wasn't talking about these old stone walls, not any more.

These walls were no longer the place of forgiveness—
no longer was this really the *Temple*.

But Jesus Himself is the new Temple.

He is the point of forgiveness.

Wherever He is, there we have all that the Temple ever offered, and more!

And that Temple, the body of Christ, was destroyed and raised on the 3rd day!

And wherever that risen body comes to us today,

there we have the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting!

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit