

Jesus is the Temple

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

March 2-3, 2024

Year B: Lent 3: John 2:13-22

The Temple was the place where human life and divine blessing meet. In John's telling of the clearing of the Temple, Jesus is now the Temple of God. Which means that God is so committed to meeting us, that God takes on flesh...becomes Incarnate. We have no other way of meeting God than through our bodies. How do we worship away from our sanctuary building? We worship through our bodies.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

God's presence is with us this day, in this holy space. Amen.

How many of us love this church? How many of us remember the various stages and phases of the construction of our church building: the old hut, when the fountain worked in the parking lot, when the cross tapestry was hooked by all of you members? How many of us love what our church represents to ourselves, our families, and our community?

Now...imagine the horrific. A terrible fire comes through west Loveland and our church building is destroyed. It is laid bare. The only thing left from the sanctuary is the marble baptismal font. The rest is all gone. The ministry we once had from inside this space has come to a full stop.

When the fire department gives us access, we gather to stand on the ashes of our property. We huddle together, in shock at what is absent before us. What would we feel? Sad? Angry? Confusion? Deep sense of loss for certain.

Heaven forbid this ever happens! No imagined story can adequately express the shock and anger felt by others when Jesus cleared the Temple that day.

Nothing can quite express, the shock and anger of Jesus, Himself, within what was supposed to be God's Temple.

The Temple in Jesus' day was the place where earth and heaven met. It was the space where human life and divine blessings met. The Temple was the absolute center of Judaism in Jesus' day. It was the center of worship and music, national identity, and politics. Most importantly the Temple housed God. God was believed to live in the most sacred of spaces, "The Holy of Holies" within the Temple itself. Around the Holy of Holies was the court of the priests. Farther out was the court of the Jewish men and separate from that was the court for the Jewish women. On the farthest edge was the court of the Gentiles. That space where non-Jews could also come and worship, or make sacrifice on special occasions.

The Temple was a complete system within itself. Monies collected helped pay for staff, building repairs...in essence most all the items our offerings go towards. Except we don't have to buy any cattle, goats and pigeons for sacrifice.

This story is recorded in all the Gospels. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus appears particularly angry with the money changers. And the placement of the story is near the end of each Gospel contributing to the reasons Jesus is arrested. In John's Gospel, the story comes in Chapter 2. We see exactly what Jesus sees as He looks around. He gets angry about the Temple being a marketplace instead of a house of prayer.

When asked why He made such a messy commotion, Jesus' reply is about Himself. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." No one understands Jesus is speaking of His own body. John places this story at the beginning of the Gospel, because he wants people to begin to see Jesus as the Temple of God. A building not made of bricks and stones, but of God Himself.

It was an audacious claim to be certain for the Jewish Temple had a long history. The first one to be built was 970 years before Christ. The second, built in 516 B.C.

In Jesus' day, renovations were ongoing to this most holy and sacred space. People made pilgrimages to Jerusalem to get as close as they could to God, for worship.

But now, God had come as close as possible to people. Remember, ***the Temple was the place where human life and divine blessing meet. In John's telling of the clearing of the Temple, Jesus is now the Temple of God. Which means that God is so committed to meeting us, that God takes on flesh...becomes Incarnate.***

It would be a radically new theology. They wouldn't need the Temple anymore. God not contained in one spot, the Holy of Holies, in a temple, but God, walking around interacting with people. God in a body. Jesus would now be the place where human life and divine blessings met.

The Hebrew scriptures, took on new life, through Jesus. He was the Word made flesh. Instead of this glorious building, now, Jesus Himself bore the absolute glory of God, where God chose to dwell. Jews were expected to travel to the Temple for Passover; remembering the freedom, liberation and rescue from slavery of their ancestors. Jesus, represents the freedom and liberation that will come for now for God's people, once again. Jesus is the Temple.

God was so committed to meeting us, God took on flesh. God had to meet us finally, through a human body. Jesus made God known as He touched and spoke. As He ate meals and as He prayed. God was made known not in some closed off space, but out with people. It was God's Work, Jesus' hands. Jesus showed people what love looked like and acted like because He embodied the divine.

If we think about it, we too, have no other way of meeting God than through our bodies. We encounter God through this: mind, heart, spirit. For centuries, God's people have known this. They've made pilgrimages by walking. Taking days and weeks at a time, the rhythm of walking has cleared ones mind and opened hearts. Several couples in our church have walked the El Camino. Ask them about meeting God by walking.

Here at church, we meet God through our bodies. We chew the bread. We swallow the wine. We hear God's Word. We sing the hymns. We pass and share God's peace, not simply a nice gesture, but literally the peace of God gets spoken through our lips and shared by our hands. We pray and receive nudging from the Holy Spirit in our spirits. So even though we are in this worship space, this temple, the only way we can worship is with this flesh.

Think about for yourself, all the ways you recognize God through others. There was a video circulating on youtube. A toddler repeatedly tells his mama how pretty she is on her wedding day. “Mom, you are beautiful.” She doesn’t want to cry, so she gently tells him to stop. “Mom, you are beautiful.” He won’t quit saying it, patting her dress. “Mom, you are beautiful.” Sweet pure love: God.

Or the famous runner and missionary, Eric Liddell, depicted in the movie, “Chariots of Fire.” He refused to run a qualifying race on Sunday, because of the commandment about the Sabbath. He brought glory to God when he ran. That was worship.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” (New Revised Standard Version. Zondervan Publishing. Grand Rapids, MI. 1989. Pg 1038.)

Often Lent is seen as a time to restrict our bodies. Give up foods, or other vices that take us away from God. I’ve been asking you each weekend, what is the next right step for you and myself, to take in our worship of God. If we think about our bodies and spirits as a temple of the living God, then we can think about spiritual fitness. What shall we feed our minds? How shall we exercise our spirits? How can we work out our bodies to make space for God to stretch us?

Walking prayerfully and mindfully, we will worship God with our bodies by walking the labyrinth. We can refrain from foods if it becomes a form of worship and not simply punishment. What about forgiving a grudge so that our spirit gets lighter. What about trying to see God in each person we meet? Let us focus this week, on knowing and worshiping God through your body.

Will you pray with me? Lord Jesus, thank you for coming to us as the Incarnate God. We worship you, we love you, we honor you. Help us this week, to meet you just as you met us, in the amazing temples of our own flesh. May we honor our bodies, so as to honor you. Amen.