

## John 2:13-22

<sup>13</sup>The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup>In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. <sup>15</sup>He made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>To those selling doves he said, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a place of business!”

<sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

<sup>18</sup>So the Jews responded, “What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?”

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.”

<sup>20</sup>The Jews said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?” <sup>21</sup>But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.

## Righteous Indignation

### I.

You sigh as you enter church. It’s that time of year again—the time leading up to Passover. Jewish faithful from all over the world are coming to make their pilgrimage to the temple to make their sacrifices and pay their temple-tax.

It probably all seems very practical and pragmatic to the Jewish out-of-town-ers. They’ll stop in the equivalent of the narthex area for all the necessary items for their sacrifices. Some loaves for their bread offerings, some grain for their grain offerings, a couple pigeons or doves or a lamb. Since they have traveled for worship to Jerusalem from a foreign country, they’ll need to exchange their currency for the proper coinage to pay the so-called temple tax of a half shekel, due every year as their temple dues. Why go to three or four merchants in the Jerusalem marketplace to make all these transactions when one-stop-shopping is available right at the temple? Besides, the animals sold here are guaranteed to be accepted by the priest on duty as suitable for sacrifice. These merchants and the priests have a deal whereby the animals are basically pre-approved.

The reason *you* sigh as you enter is that you are not of Jewish decent by birth. You are what was known as a proselyte—a Gentile by birth, but one who came to know and worship the true God.

<sup>21</sup>st Century people might wonder, “What’s the big deal? Why is it so disturbing to you as a Gentile when Jewish believers are coming from all over the place to worship the true God? Why shouldn’t they be coming?”

The big deal is that a Gentile convert to Judaism couldn’t go in to the temple proper. This narthex area was called the Courtyard of the Gentiles. This is as far as you could go in your worship of the true God. And here it was that all these entrepreneurs set up shop. Here it was, the one place where you could go for worship, that the noise and stench of animals was topped by the bawling of merchants and the Jewish faithful haggling and bargaining over the appropriate prices or rate of exchange for currency.

Sigh. Worship was going to be even harder for this particular month than it was the rest of the year. There was nothing to be done but deal with it.

The out-of-town Jewish faithful didn’t really feel much better about it. They had traveled a distance to worship the Lord, but first they had to stop and haggle and barter to get the

required offerings and sacrifices before going in to church. You had to have the proper funds to deposit in the offering plate. You couldn't open up the app on your phone and make an electronic payment that would automatically go through the conversion rate of a reputable bank. This was the most logical place to get the distasteful job done. You couldn't easily walk to Jerusalem with your sacrificial animals on a lead rope all the way, or birds in a cage to bring for sacrifice. And even if you did, there was no guarantee that the priest would find them acceptable. The faithful Jewish out-of-town believer probably let out a sigh before entering the Courtyard of the Gentiles to get his business done, too.

But here comes Jesus. Those who think Jesus was always the figure we see in pictures with a lamb in his arms, or the picture where Jesus calms the wind and the waves that were terrifying his disciples, or the Jesus gathering the little children around him to speak to them and touch them and love them, or the Jesus of the miracles of healing and feeding are grossly mistaken.

The loving Jesus shows love by displaying his righteous anger. "He made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup>To those selling doves he said, 'Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a place of business!'" (John 2:15-16, EHV).

Sometimes we forget about these pictures of Jesus. The whip of cords to drive out the money changers could be hung next to the picture of him identifying religious leaders as a brood of snakes, or even his harsh words in last week's gospel when he called Peter Satan. Yes, Jesus is love. But his righteous anger has a place in the midst of love. His righteous anger is directed at those who impede proper worship.

## II.

So. The tables are turned over. The coins are tossed all over the floor. The animals and the merchants have been driven out.

Ah! How satisfying! Now *I* can get back to making *my* bargains with God.  
Wait. What?

We like to trade, don't we? We want to get the best deal, just like the Jewish faithful coming from all over the place. They wanted the best deal on a lamb for the sacrifice and the best rate of exchange for their offering check. They wanted to pay the least they could to "buy" God's favor.

Don't we do this, too? What's the minimum the 21<sup>st</sup> Century believer needs to "do" to earn God's favor—to get his blessing? We try to make some bargains with God. How often do I *need* to come to church to be all right with God? Once or twice a year? A few more times, perhaps? Those who come far more regularly make different bargains. "Well, I'm here, aren't I? Doesn't that count for *something*? Do I really have to pay attention through the whole service, actually notice what the hymns are saying or try to understand the Scripture readings? No one can actually listen to all the prayers in the worship service, can they? And the Creed—we recite a creed every week at church. I don't really think about what I'm saying, but I believe it, just the same."

Trading doesn't really go over well in God's house. Our attempts to make deals with God profane his house. The marketplace atmosphere in the outer courtyard of the temple was a stench in God's nostrils. That's why Jesus came along in righteous anger and drove the merchants out. It wasn't just the merchants that were the problem. The corrupt priesthood made deals with the merchants for a cut of the extortionary profits. The people who came

for worship tried as hard as they could to get the best deal possible for themselves. It was *all* profane.

What can you trade God for his love and favor? Over and over again we are told and we say we believe it—salvation is a free gift of God’s grace. Why do we try to strike bargains for what is already free? Beyond that—what hubris, what self-righteous egotism to think that *we* have anything we can even attempt to offer God! Those who try to offer something to God thinking that they have anything of value to give will be driven out, just like the merchants. God will cleanse his temple of such pretenders.

### III.

With the merchant class emptied out, the temple atmosphere could return to the way it was supposed to be. God’s house is holy.

That is still the case for us today. This worship space is set apart for *his* work, not ours. Our order of worship today is called “Divine Service I.” The term Divine Service is taken from the concept of the German word for the worship service—Gottesdienst—God’s Service. The primary factor in the worship service is not *our* work for God, but *his* work for us. He *allows* us the opportunity to praise him for his mighty deeds which culminated in our salvation, but in this hour of worship he reminds *us* that he has accomplished these things for us. *That* is what inspires our praise of him in the first place.

“His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me’” (John 2:17, EHV). God is zealous about mercy. Jesus has opened God’s house for all people with no admission charge.

“Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.’ ... <sup>21</sup>But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body” (John 2:19, 21, EHV). It is his love and mercy which prompted the Savior to take on our human nature so that he could also take on our load of sin and pay for it as our substitute. The temple of Christ’s body was destroyed so that he might raise it up again and save us from destruction. He does not want us to try and bargain for forgiveness—*he* already completed the process.

### IV.

Sigh. What a relief it is that Jesus cleansed the temple in righteous anger.

Just as he drove out the money changers and the animal merchants from God’s temple, so also the Lord Jesus has cleansed the temple of our hearts. He has wiped out our sins. He has removed our guilt, our fear, our attempts to find favor with him through all the empty promises we make. He has restored us to *real* life—life *now* that finds joy in his salvation, and life eternal when we will live with him in glory forever.

Jesus was zealous in cleansing the temple from everything that would distract and detract from the message of the cross. The reason we have and maintain *this* house of God is to have a place for the people of God to come together to worship and celebrate his rescuing of us—the cleansing he has done for us. God is zealous about mercy. Jesus has opened God’s house of prayer to all people, with no admission charge. His grace is free and limitless.

God grant that we would not attempt to bargain with him for things that he has already given to us, but would instead respond to his love with tokens of our own love, given from joyous hearts as an opportunity to love him, because he first loved us. Amen.