

Sermon - March 7, 2021 - Third Sunday in Lent

Gospel Reading: John 2:13–22 Jesus Cleanses the Temple

**13** The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. **15** And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. **16** And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." **17** His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

**18** So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." **20** The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,<sup>[a]</sup> and will you raise it up in three days?" **21** But he was speaking about the temple of his body. **22** When therefore 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.

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Do you remember "Magic-Eye pictures?" At first glance they seem to be a jumble of wavy lines or repeated patterns or images. But if you changed your focus and tried to look through or past the image on the page, another image, a "3D image," would appear. These Magic Eye pictures were everywhere from the back of cereal boxes to newspapers. And since the mid 1990's they have kind of disappeared... much like cereal boxes and newspapers.

In our lesson today... I would like us to take the Magic-Eye approach and step back a few paces and look at the text with a relaxed focus. Not trying to pay attention to, or be distracted by, the details. Simply trying to look past the surface.

The image in the picture is not created in our eyes. It's created in our minds. Normally our eyes work together and track an image, but with the Magic-Eye, you have to let each eye track separately. The exact same thing happens when you look through a set of stereo spectacles. Each eye is allowed to look at a different

“center” in the image, and your brain combines the two images into ONE. You’ve seen this if you have ever done the “floating finger” experiment.

If you are one of those people who can’t seem to ever see the magic eye image, it’s because you are having trouble letting your eyes track the image separately. I’m told this is likely because you have a dominant eye that does most of your tracking. One solution is to close that eye and look at the image closely, then slowly open the dominant eye.

In any case the illustration is being used here, so that we might view this story with a different focus, and see if maybe there is a new image that emerges for us to see.

The HEADLINE for the story is simple. JESUS CLEANS THE TEMPLE.

We see him express great ZEAL for his Father’s house.

We see him upsetting the money changers and animals and the general COMMERCE that

1. Doesn’t belong in the temple and
2. He authorizes himself to cast it out.

As our Epistle (1 Corinthians 1:18–31) points out... The Jews WILL DEMAND a SIGN and the Gentiles WILL DEMAND wisdom (in others words they want a good argument)

The Jews say... SHOW me the SIGN and my HEART will follow you.

The Gentiles say... Convince my MIND with WISDOM, then I will agree with you.

The thing is, the Jews all KNOW that commerce doesn’t belong in the temple. So how did it get there in the first place? Well, I suppose it was a matter of convenience.

The Temple is a place where sacrifices are made. If you are coming from far away to make a sacrifice, it might be worth it to you to BUY your sacrifice from the

tradesmen, rather than bring an animal with you all that distance. It started with doves, then goats and lambs and oxen.

It started at the gate of the city, then the steps, then the court of the Gentiles.

Like a camel's nose under the tent... and I would not be surprised to learn that the priests probably received kick-backs for allowing certain vendors to have choice locations. I'm sure the people complained. But if the priests, like corrupt politicians, were not motivated to serve the people's needs, before long, people were just putting up with it. This is the way things are now.

In it crept... corruption. Now, there is nothing wrong with buying and selling. There is a time and place for every activity under heaven. But it didn't belong here. This was God's house. And NOT a house of commerce.

The Jews know that buying and selling do not belong in the temple. But they've allowed it.

But Jesus will not. And his zeal for his Father's house motivates him to clean up the people's mess. And I say the people's mess. Who's to blame? Everyone. The priests mostly. But the people also did not hold their clerics to account. What could they do? They could demand faithfulness, including from themselves. Which might mean, not making use of the convenience of buying a sacrifice from the vendors. Simple economics.

But it's hard to do. Isn't it? We *like* convenience. It's even worth paying for. But what price do we pay?

Jesus will have to pay a greater price to set it all right again.

They wanted a sign... Well, how about the sign of the cross. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days,"

But he was speaking about the temple of his body.

<sup>19</sup>Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; <sup>20</sup>you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

<sup>16</sup>Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's **temple** is sacred, and you together are that **temple**.

SO the BIG picture... the MAGIC EYE of the story is what? Perhaps it's time for a little spring cleaning in our own temples?

What is there in *your* temple that doesn't belong there? What corruption have you let creep into your life that needs to be overturned and tossed out?

Let's run through the commandments if you need help in this matter. A quick trip through the second table perhaps.

Honor your mother and father -- and all those in authority over you. How are you doing with that?

No adultery... Sexual sins of all kinds... Any impure thoughts and behaviors?

Do not take what does not belong to you.

I still remember the guy who offered me \$100 to hook up his HBO for "free" back when I was working for the cable company. \$100? Dude, that would buy almost a year.

"Yeah, but it would be worth it after that."

"No. I don't think so," I said.

"What? Are you a company man or something?"

“Sort of,” I said. “My God says that we shouldn’t steal.”

He slammed the door.

How about bearing false witness against your neighbor? Have gossip, slander and swearing worked their way into your temple?

Or maybe coveting the things that others have? Is jealousy or envy cluttering the sacred hallway of your mind?

Time to DEclutter. That’s a good way of honoring LENT after all. Get rid of the rot and mold and dust... the stuff that you don’t need or want in you life. The convenient and easy stuff that sidetracks your spiritual well-being.

This is what our Lord has come to do. And it’s finished. He is the Last and Final Sacrifice, and that’s why the temple curtains were torn in two at this death... and the building that was the temple is no more. Jesus has a new temple. And it is YOU.

Amen