

JOHN 2 V 13-22 LULLINGSTONE 4.3.18

The reading we have just heard read from John chapter 2, is about good coming out of bad. God is able to bring good out of bad. That thought ought to cheer us. We all do some bad things during our lives and suffer bad experiences, but God has the power to redeem the bad -- and that is a blessing.

It was the time of the Passover, and the city of Jerusalem was packed with pilgrims who had gathered to commemorate Israel's deliverance out of slavery in Egypt. Not only was it a solemn religious celebration, but also a great national statement that defied all who would dare to oppress them in the future. No doubt tensions were high, and Roman soldiers mingled with the crowds around the great concourse of the Temple (roughly equivalent to the cloisters of a Western Cathedral).

Entering the Temple, Jesus found those who were selling sheep and oxen, and doves. Moneychangers sat at tables exchanging foreign currencies for the Temple shekel. All this took place in the court of the Gentiles, thereby denying the nations a place to draw aside from the hubbub of their busy lives!

The selling of animals and the changing of coins were necessary, because people came from everywhere, far and near at Passover to make their sacrifices in the temple and to pay their temple tax. The scriptures provided that only the best animals -- those without blemish -- were acceptable as sacrifices. How could anyone bring a top-quality animal -- one without blemish -- perfectly groomed -- from Galilee or Rome or Egypt? They couldn't! Anyone who has travelled across country with children knows that, at the end of such a journey, nobody is perfectly groomed -- nobody gets there without blemish! So these travellers needed to buy their sacrificial animals in Jerusalem. They needed someone to set up shop to provide acceptable animals.

And these travellers would bring money from their own country and the countries through which they passed to get to Jerusalem. So these travellers

needed to exchange what they had into coins acceptable for the temple-tax. They needed someone to set up a money exchange. But they didn't need a marketplace inside the temple walls, they could set up their stalls everywhere, along with the others in the Kidron valley.

I started this sermon by saying that God can bring good from bad. The bad was the marketplace inside the temple walls. God was not well served by the crowding and the noise and the smell of animals inside the temple precincts.

God's temple was being misused, by turning it into a marketplace, they had forgotten, or didn't care that God's house is a place of worship and not a place for making profit. Our attendance to church is not to progress our business or personal life, but to praise and worship God and have a closer relationship with him.

How would you like to make a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to a cathedral to worship God and then have to navigate that kind of mess to get to the sanctuary? Jesus didn't like it at all. He didn't just order them to get out -- he got a whip and drove them out. He scattered their tables and their money and their dignity all over the floor. The effect must have been like a stick in the spokes of a bicycle -- he stopped everything cold.

So the marketplace in the temple was bad, but God brought good from the bad. This incident in the temple gave Jesus the opportunity to introduce himself as God's Son. Jesus would be the new temple -- the new place where people would come into the presence of God. We no longer need to travel to Jerusalem to commune with God. We can commune with God wherever we are, on our own or together. Matthew 18 verse 20 For where two or three are gathered in my name I am there among them. Our pilgrimage into God's presence need not be a once-in-a-lifetime affair. We can enter God's presence whenever, He should be with us always, because Jesus makes God accessible.

And that is Good News! It is Good News, because we all have experiences in our lives where we feel completely isolated -- when we wonder where God is -- when the pain seems too great to bear. The promise is that God is with us even through the valley of the shadow of death. The promise is that God redeems us. The promise is that God brings good from even the worst situation.

“The Jews”—in particular the Jewish religious leaders directly confront Jesus with a challenge. They demand a sign to demonstrate His authority to act as He has. The irony is that Jesus’ actions are the sign

For someone to cleanse the temple and correct wrongdoing found there implies having the authority to do so. If Jesus is acting on God’s behalf (they cannot yet grasp that He is acting as God), then let Him establish His credentials by an exercise of divine power. If He is acting with God’s authority, let Him perform a sign to prove it. We have an irreverent expression, which captures the spirit of the Jews’ challenge (who are not very reverent either): “Put up, or shut up!” That’s what they wanted Jesus to do. They have thrown down the gauntlet. It is Jesus’ turn to respond.

Jesus is not about to jump through their hoops. He does not even try to convince them who He is. Instead, He speaks to them of the “ultimate sign,” His death and resurrection: “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again” (verse 19). They assume Jesus is referring to Herod’s temple, a temple which has been under construction for “forty-six years.” Does Jesus think He can build a temple in three days that has already been under construction for so long and is not yet complete?

John tells his readers what we already know. Jesus is not speaking of that earthly temple; But He is speaking of Himself as the temple of God, and of His coming crucifixion. He is not trying to persuade these Jews to believe in Him, but rather to prophesy that they will not believe, and that they will put Him to death on Calvary. His triumph will be evident in three days, when He will be “raised up” from the dead.

Since the ascension, His body is in heaven at the right hand of God, where He forever intercedes on our behalf.

In the meantime Christ’s Temple upon earth is found in: (1) the church, and (2) the in the individual Christian, in other words, in us.

If the church collectively is the temple of our Lord, it is also true that we are individually “temples” of the Holy Spirit. Because this is true, our sins in the body are taken most seriously.

It is easy to believe when it is exciting and everyone around us believes the same way. But we must keep our faith firm even when it isn't popular to follow Christ.

God is no distant deity but a constant reality, a very present help whenever needs occur. So? So let us live like it. Let us be the Jesus that is inside us.

Amen