

Zeal for Your House

March 4, 2018

John 2:13-17

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making 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. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The time in today's Scripture is right before Passover. Jesus goes to Jerusalem and finds people selling things, making money, and exchanging currency. Jesus gets upset! We have never known Jesus to get so upset. In fact, this is the only time we see in the Scripture Jesus getting upset. Notice this - it is not about the self - when we get upset it is almost always about the self. "What about me? My feeling were hurt! It's not fair!" Jesus' concern is not about the self. Jesus is concerned for the house of God. Throughout his ministry Jesus' concern has been threefold; God, the temple, and care of the people.

The temple is known as Herod's temple. Of course, we know it is God's temple. The first temple was desired by King David and built by his son King Solomon. That temple was destroyed by the Babylonians during the exile. The second temple to be built came after the exile. It was authorized by Cyrus the Great who conquered the Babylonian empire. Herod the Great expanded upon that temple because he had a problem with fitting all the pilgrims into the temple during three main festivals; Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. So, he renovated and expanded the temple significantly.

The temple was the ritual center of the Jewish people; it was the heart of the Israelite nation and religion. All adult males were required to attend the ritual services. It became known as Herod's Temple. Because it was the greatest building achievement of the time. It was so extensive that some said the work could never be completed. It was one of the most outstanding feats of the Roman Empire and took 46 years to complete.

The temple was centered focus extending out to areas according to a graduated scale of holiness. The Holy of Holies was centered and was the most sacred place. Only the High Priest could enter it and only once a year. The Holy Place was the sanctuary. Then there was the Court of Priests, the Court of Israel, the Women's Court, and the Court of Gentiles. Then there were covered walkways called porticoes, or porches. People were free to meet, talk, and teach in the portico areas. This is where Jesus would teach. It was in the Royal Portico where business was conducted and money changers were located.

Burnt sacrificial offerings in the temple required cattle, sheep, and doves. For the Passover pilgrimage feast many people had to travel great distance to get there. They did not bring the animals with them so they needed to buy them in order to participate in the worship ceremonies. The temple tax was not paid in Greek or Roman currency because of the human image that was on the coins. For the temple they used Tyrian currency. The coins of Tyre was the medium payment of the temple tax. So, in the Temple there were merchants selling animals and money changers exchanging currency. They had a captive audience so the prices were jacked up significantly and the exchange rate was unfavorable.

What Jesus does is he confronts abuses of the temple system. He confronts the system itself. He challenges the authority of the Temple and its methods of worship. It is not about Jesus'

anger. It is not a lesson to demonstrate the humanity of Jesus by showing that even Jesus gets mad. No, the scandal is the power structure of the Temple. Jesus challenges the authority of the Temple. Religious leaders have developed a system that is in contrast to the very nature of worshiping God, which was the original design of the Temple. It became more about the institution and the religious leaders than about God.

The religious leaders demand a sign that warrants such action. What is the authority of Jesus to act in this way? Jesus explains his authority to challenge their authority by appealing to the power of God. They did not understand what he was talking about. Jesus was not against Judaism. Jesus was an observant Jewish male that traveled to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage feasts. Jesus' challenge to authority is not anti-Jewish. No, he is in line with the prophets. Jesus' challenge is to a system that is embedded in its own rules and practices; a system that is no longer open to fresh revelation from God.

That is the contemporary lesson for us today. Many times I have said "the lesson is how the Scripture speaks to us today." The religious system was broken. It was focused on the needs of the institution. This temptation also applies to contemporary Christianity. The problem was the attitude of people. Their attitude was Herod's temple vs. God's temple. Herod's temple needs resources for the institution. God's temple needs faith. God's temple needs people worshiping God. The lesson for us is make sure our religious system is about God. As we model our lives after Jesus may we also have zeal for God's house.