

7th March 2021

Bible reading: John 2:13-22

What Makes God Angry?

Introduction:

On this third Sunday of Lent we start to prepare for Easter. Often people use Lent to pursue self-discipline so they have more time for prayer and reflection. Are you giving up something for Lent? Coffee, social media, alcohol, complaining.

We start this series with the rather radical action of Jesus that starts to make some of us a tad uncomfortable. We are used to Him calling out the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. Admit it, you all like that a little, and so do I, as long as I'm not one of the ones he is exposing. But that is not what Jesus is doing in this story in John's gospel.

Today, Jesus is going to church and when he walks in, he is crushed by what he sees. Anger builds up and in a scene that doesn't feel too much like the Jesus we know from our children's Bibles. He grabs some ropes and makes a whip and starts to chase people out of church. He yells at them, turns over tables, scatters money and kicks all the animals out.

We get uncomfortable because, what happened to the gentle Jesus meek and mild? What happened to the guy who smiles and is welcoming to everyone? Is it okay for Jesus to get angry? Jesus seems more like a bouncer at a night club now. This is a little threatening, and I am sure the people are shocked about what is happening, including his disciples.

The anger is not the emotional reaction of losing His temper. His, is a righteous anger that speaks against injustice, disguise and abuse. This is not the only occasion, on other occasions he said;

- Drown the one who hurts a child – Matthew 18:6
- Woe to the religious leaders – Matthew 23:13-39
- I bring a sword to divide families – Matthew 10:34

The Gospel accounts:

However, this incident is so important that it is included in all four Gospels. What is different is when it happens in John's gospel. The Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, have this story happening after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. After Palm Sunday Jesus walks into the temple and sees what is happening and then sends them all out. This happens in the 21st chapter of Matthew, 11th chapter of Mark and the 19th chapter of Luke, but here we are only in chapter 2 of John!

In John's gospel, we have received the poetic opening, John the Baptist's testimony, the calling of the disciples, and the wedding at Cana. It seems really early, but John's gospel does things a little different.

Each Gospel in our Bible comes from a different perspective.

Luke is written for those already in the faith living in the Gentile world.

Mark is written for those involved in the Jewish Roman war.

Matthew was written to bring Jews into the faith.

John came from a different perspective. His is to prove that Jesus is God's Son.

While the synoptics are not afraid to point out Jesus' humanity, John leaves some of those stories out to prove without a doubt Jesus' divinity. There is no baptism or temptation story in John. There is no prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. Instead, you have stories that are unique to John's gospel like the washing of the disciple's feet at the Last Supper. This is

where we get the great “I Am” statements of Jesus, like when he says, “I am the good shepherd”, or “I am the light unto the world.”

John’s purpose for his gospel, is to reveal God’s purpose, and God’s power. So why is this one of the first things Jesus does in his ministry and not one of the last, like in the other gospels? The answer is simple. **John is setting up God’s power over this world, and demonstrating how much change is coming through Jesus.**

The second chapter starts off by Jesus turning water into wine. He takes jugs used in the purification ritual and turns that water into wine. The act of purification is changing because of Jesus’ ministry and purpose on earth. It is not the same as it used to be, it is now different because God’s Son has come to earth.

Worship and the purpose of the temple is changing as well. No longer will undefiled animals be needed to atone for sin. No longer will there even be a need for a temple because Jesus’ body is taking over that purpose. Jesus’ visit and action happens early in John’s gospel because it creates a foundation of Jesus’ ministry that says radical changes are occurring, because God’s Word made flesh will change everything!

It is like asking the question, where does God Abide/Dwell?

- In the Garden – Original Creation Genesis 2-3
- In the Tabernacle (tent) 1250 B.C. Exodus
- In Temple 1 – (house) 968-586 B.C. 1 Kings
- In Temple 2 – (house) 515 – A.D. 70 Ezra

In Jesus, God’s Word made flesh has changed everything!

Context:

John tells us it is near to the religious festival of Passover—the annual week-long celebration where God delivered His people with an outstretched arm.

At the beginning of the Passover week, everybody is busy cleaning the nooks and crannies of their homes to get all the yeast and leaven out. This holiday tradition is not just for show, it is a God-mandated deep clean, and while everyone is cleaning their own houses, Jesus is bothered by the mess in God’s dwelling place.

The Temple was set up in circles of holiness; from the outside in, each level was holier than the last. The inner most level was the Holy of Holies—the very place that the presence of the Living God dwelled.

Imagine now that you are a first century Gentile and you have walked hundreds of miles to Jerusalem for Passover and the only space you are permitted to encounter God is a busy, dirty flea market. Jesus shows up on the scene with a whip and He clears His Father’s house out completely. For the first time in a long time, there is *actually* space for silence, prayer, worship—and most importantly—space made just for you. Jesus, who is permitted to the deeper levels of the Temple and intimacy with God, is there in the outer edges. He seems to care for people like you.

The important part of this story is that Jesus does not just clean His own house because the law requires Him to. His actions were not just some religious pageantry to sweep the house before family shows up for the holidays.

Jesus cleans His Father’s house of corruption. He cleaned the Temple of religion. He cleaned the Temple of hypocrites and con artists. And in doing so, He made space for women,

children, the lame, the sick, and the outsiders to all have a place where they could meet the Living God.

When the religious leaders and lawyers got upset at Jesus for this act, He started talking about a different Temple. They demanded proof and Jesus spoke of a new system that was coming, one that they did not have a grid for.

This other Temple, the body of Christ, would be a lot like the temple in Jerusalem because the very presence and Spirit of the Living God would dwell there. But nobody understood it until after the resurrection, that this profound mystery Jesus was talking about, the body of Christ, and ultimately the Church, and that it would be a place that was open to everyone who believes in Him.

Richard Rohr, in an article called “Alternate Reality, Rohr says: *I am told that there are three kinds of cultures in the Western world today, each with its own “bottom line”:*

- *political cultures based on the manipulation of power,*
- *economic cultures based on the manipulation of money, and*
- *religious cultures based on the manipulation of some theory about God.*

These three cultures are based on different forms of violence, although it is usually denied by most participants and hidden from the superficial observer. Evil gains its power from disguise. Jesus undid the mask of disguise and revealed that our true loyalty was seldom really to God, but to power, money, and group belonging. (In fact, religion is often the easiest place to hide from God.)...Challenging the status quo is unpopular. Jesus was killed for opposing the religious and political powers of his time.

Often this text is read for what it negates—unethical temple practices. While one could reasonably conclude that from the synoptic versions, a careful reading of John’s telling leads one to conclude that John is much more concerned with communicating something positive, that is, the scope of Jesus’ authority.

Gilberto Ruiz helps clarify this positive role for the story in John. “*He appears in Jerusalem making a bold statement not so much ‘against’ anything as much as ‘for’ his authority to represent and reveal the God of the temple, whom he knows intimately as his Father.*”

This is a text that points out Jesus’ authority over the religious apparatus of Judaism. This is not so much a critique as it is a heads up that Jesus is not bound by it, and indeed, is able to step in to correct misunderstandings.

God is not the temple. Jesus speaks over the temple in a way that no one in the text understands at the time. They are not used to seeing someone speak with authority OVER the authority of the temple.

Richard Beck says, “*the principalities and powers will always seek to capture and enslave God in an attempt to use the name of God to underwrite current power arrangements.*”

In Lent, one of the ways Christians confess is to confess the ways we have sought to make our religion and religious practices “God”, and in so doing seek to control “God.”

This is not a time to critique the church as a religious system, as much as it might be an opportunity for confessing the ways we allow, and even desire, a religious system or practice (personal, local, denominational) to become ultimate in our lives taking the place of the God revealed in Jesus.

This does not negate or marginalize religious organizations or practices. Instead, it sets these in a proper place; under the authority of God and able to be critiqued by God.

That kind of confession and realization can bring great freedom in a person's life. With this honesty, we are able to embrace faith and the practices of that faith in a final kind of way, not seeking life in the practices alone, but in the God, who inhabits our faith and is free to clear the courts of our practices when we begin to set them up over God.

We started with the question; What makes God Angry?

The people in Jesus' day had turned faith into a commodity. The temple was no longer a place to meet God. It was a place to buy the equipment/paraphernalia of faith. It was no longer a place to go and worship the creator of the universe. It was a place to go in order to meet our human needs, wants and desires.

The Bible says; Joel 2:13

*“Return to the LORD your **God**, for he **is** gracious and compassionate, **slow to anger** and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity”.*

What makes God angry?

- Idolatry 1 kings 14:9
- Sin, Injustice & crime 2 Samuel 12:5
- Giving Glory to another Romans 1:22-23

Cleansing the temple was a sign that he has authority over all the world. Recognizing his authority will inevitably upset a few tables in our carefully ordered realities. Whether we are talking about our churches, our culture, or our individual lives of faith, we are all guilty of creating idols that distract us from Christ.

Every good gift that we have been given can get between us and our relationship with God when approached in the wrong manner. We can even turn our churches into marketplaces to meet our needs, instead of letting them be Christ's body at work in the world.

Faith is not about us!

How do we overcome this temptation? Jesus tells us to *“take these things out of here.”* He is cracking the whip and flipping over the tables of our complacency. In short, the temple is not about us. It is about the worship of the God who made us. That is why the people of God built the temple. That is why Jesus cleansed it so forcefully. That is what we need to be doing in our lives today. Worship is not about us. Discipleship requires discipline.

Today's story is a reminder to stop pretending that we are in charge.

This is a hard process. It flies in the face of everything our culture tells us is true. Christians are not spiritual consumers looking for a new religious gimmick. Christians are called to be the body of Christ. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are his temple in the world today.

In short, we do not come to church. We are the church. This is why we gather for worship, to be the church together and to encourage each other in our lives of discipleship.

Prayer