

3 March 2024
Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Zeal for You Consumes Him”

Text: John 2:13-25; Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

What if I were to burst into a house and start tearing it apart as Jesus did? I tip over some tables and chairs, take out a wall or two, pull down some lights, rip up the carpet - what do you think? Should I be arrested? Should I have to pay for the repairs? Am I in trouble?

Well, it depends on whose house it is!

If it's not my house, well, maybe. But still it depends. I may be a workman there to renovate the house and improve it. That would be okay. If I weren't, then I guess, call the cops.

Unless . . . it's MY house! Then I can do whatever I want to it. I can tear it apart, I can fix it up, I can change it, because it belongs to me.

So when Jesus goes into the Temple that day, as we heard, and begins overturning tables and driving out the animals, some thought He had no right to do so. He needs to be arrested and have to pay for the damage He did.

But they were wrong. The Temple was God's house and so Jesus' house! As He said when He was twelve years old and His worried parents found Him in the Temple with the teachers, *Don't you know I must be in my Father's house?* And He repeated that fact on this day as well: ***do not make my Father's house a house of trade***. And the Father's house is the Son's house, too. So Jesus had every right to do what He did, even if the people didn't realize it.

And this too: Jesus had also come as the worker to renovate that house. To remodel and renew it. Soon, very soon now, all those sacrifices would no longer be necessary or needed. For the once and for all sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the sin of the world would be offered. So the Temple, as it was and had been for so long, would be obsolete. It was time for a renovation and renewal.

So Jesus coming into the Temple that day and doing what He did tells us not just something about what was going on there, but something about Him - that once again He

is showing Himself to be the Son of God in human flesh.

The key to this reading is not what Jesus DID, but who Jesus IS.

Now, the Jews wanted a sign that Jesus had the authority to do these things - that He was either sent to do this by someone with the proper authority, or that He had that authority in Himself, as the owner of the house. Show us! And Jesus' answer is that He will - His death and then third-day resurrection will be the sign. He will redeem not with gold or silver, but with *His holy precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death* (Small Catechism, Second Article). It is His blood, not animal blood, that will cleanse the world of sin. His death and resurrection will renovate and renew the Church of God, His people.

Which is what this Lenten season is about. Renovation. Renewal. Not of a building, but of your heart. To overturn the idols in your hearts. To throw out what shouldn't be there. To drive out the sinful, shameful, and evil thoughts; the bad practices and habits we've fallen into. Not *only* during Lent, but *especially* during Lent. For when God calls us to repentance and comes to clean out our hearts, He has every right to do so. For He created us, and He redeemed us, and He sanctifies us. And if you think the Temple in Jerusalem at Jesus' time was corrupt, with its money changers and sacrifice salesmen, your heart, my heart, *is even worse*.

Which is what the Commandments show us, which we heard again this morning. There's only ten of them, but that's enough. Actually, we need only one: the first. Have no other gods. Fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Every other sin comes from the fact that I fear, love, or trust something or someone else more than God. Maybe it's me - I want what I want instead of what God wants. I get to decide what's good for me, not God. Maybe it's a boyfriend or girlfriend or a co-worker, and I do what they want me to do because I am more afraid of what they will think of me than what God thinks of me. I don't trust that God will provide so I covet and take. I don't trust that God will defend so I hurt. I believe what the world says more than what God says. Shall I go on?

So Jesus comes. Has His Word preached and His gifts given. His *blood-bought* gifts. For while ***zeal for [His Father's] house consumes Him***, His love for you consumes Him even more. That's why Paul said, ***we preach Christ crucified***. There is the love of God for you. There is the zeal of God for you. There is the cleansing, renovating, and renewing forgiveness of Jesus for you. There you see that there is nothing God won't do to save you. To save you from satan. To save you from death. To save you from hell. To save you from your sin. To save you from a sinful and deceitful world. But perhaps most of all, to save you from yourself. The: I don't want to lose control, I don't want to let go, I want God to serve me, not me serve God, you.

But that's the thing - *He has!* God has come to serve you. The whole Bible is about God **coming** to us and **giving** to us and **helping** us and **serving** us and **saving** us. And what

could be more clear than this verse: *the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28). The Son of Man did come to serve us, and still is. That's what the Temple was all about. God didn't need that building. God didn't need to be there in that. We needed Him there for us. That's what the Divine Service here is all about. God doesn't need any of this - we do. We need Him here for us. And that's what the cross is all about. God come to serve us by laying down His life for us, for our life, for our forgiveness. We needed that, not Him.

So, as Paul goes on to say, talking about the cross, that God chose the **foolishness** of dying on the cross, because yes! What a foolish thing for God to do! Subject Himself to such humiliation and shame and die for those who sin and continue to sin and brought death into the world and continue to kill and hurt. Save people like that? Like you? Yes.

And God chose the **weakness** of the cross to shame those who think they are so strong. You strong enough to do that? Oh, maybe for a righteous person or a good person, right? But for your enemy? Jesus loves them, loves you, like that? Yes.

And God chose the **lowness and despisedness** of the cross, to become like a piece of garbage that is being thrown out, to rescue you from that same fate. Yes. **He is the source of your life**. The God who comes to serve you.

So **we preach Christ crucified**, Paul said. We **fix our eyes on Jesus**. That's what we've been singing in the Gradual all this Lenten season. We fix our eyes on Jesus - on Jesus at the Font, on Jesus in His Word, on Jesus on the Altar. These places where Christ crucified is for us today. Where His Body and Blood are for us today. Where His forgiveness and life are for us today. Where He is serving us today.

That place was once the Temple. That's where God had promised to be for His people to forgive and restore them, to renovate and renew them. But it was never forever. God had much more and much greater planned that that! The building, the priesthood, the sacrifices - all of it! - pointed to and foreshadowed a far greater reality. A far greater building, priest, and sacrifice than stone, men, and animals. The building, priest, and sacrifice that would be God Himself, in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the building: **Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**, Jesus said. Jesus is the sacrifice: *Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29) John said. And Jesus did not deny it. And Jesus is the priest: Jesus Himself is the priest who offers up Himself, the Lamb of God, for *no one takes [my life] from me*, Jesus said - no one could! *But I lay it down of my own accord* (John 10:18). So when Jesus came, when the Lamb of God was offered and took away the sin of the world, the Temple was no longer needed. It was obsolete. And that's GOOD! Its time and function were fulfilled. What it pointed to and prepared for was here. Time for a renovation and renewal.

And the same will one day be true of us here and this Divine Service. All that we do here

is also pointing to and foreshadowing a far greater reality. When Jesus came in the flesh, the time of the Temple came to an end. When He comes again in glory, the time of the Divine Service will come to an end. The dying and rising of Baptism and the Font will be fulfilled when we who die | will rise to life eternal on that Day. The communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus and the altar will be fulfilled when we are ushered into the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom **by the Lamb, the Son Himself!** The angels we do not see, we will see. Those who went before us, we will be with. The Word of God we now hear we will see, as Job said: *I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another* (Job 19:26-27). This will all be obsolete. And that's GOOD! This is not the ultimate. But each day that goes by, we are one day closer to it.

So if - maybe better to say *when* - Jesus comes here and upsets you, shows you your sin, doesn't let you go your merry way and do whatever you want, overturns the tables and drives out the sin in your heart, drives you to your knees in confession . . . when Jesus does that for you, don't criticize Him, don't question Him, don't condemn Him, *thank Him*. And thank Him mostly by receiving the forgiveness and life, the renovation and renewal, He has for you and wants for you. And then living that forgiveness and new life. ***Preaching Christ crucified*** in all you say and do, in how you speak and live. Laying down your life for others as He laid down His life for you. Living in the faith and knowledge that this life and the things of this world and life are not the ultimate, the end all be all - **there is a greater, a far greater life, coming**. And as we heard and considered last week: you gonna give up that | to save this?

No, this is not the ultimate. Jesus going into the Temple that day reminds us of that. This is all returning to dust. You are returning to dust. But when your body is destroyed and returns to the dust of death, when Jesus comes again, on the Last Day, He will raise it up - He will raise you up - to that life that has no end, *just as He is risen from the dead, live and reigns to all eternity*. He has done it! And we confess it: *This is most certainly true* (Small Catechism, Second Article).

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.