

Sermon on John 2:13-22

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Introduction: In verses 18 and 20 the NRSV uses the translation “The Jews.” The CEB uses “The Jewish Leaders.” The NRSV is more literal, the CEB is more accurate. It’s important for us to remember that everyone who is in this scene, including Jesus, is Jewish.

Scripture Reading — John 2:13-22 (NRSV)

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making 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. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After 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.

UPSET: It was around 30 AD, Jesus said “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” But the temple had been around long before that.

DEEPENING: The Exodus was in c. 1200 BC, the Tabernacle was built shortly thereafter. The Tabernacle was a portable tent sanctuary used during the Israelites’ wilderness wanderings that housed Ark of the Covenant.

Of course, the whole world was God’s dwelling place, but God was especially present in the Tabernacle, the bridgehead of heaven on earth. It was sometimes called the “Tent of Meeting” because it was the best place to go if you wanted to encounter God. It was a place where heaven (God’s dimension) and earth (our dimension) overlapped and interlocked.

In the mid 900's BC king Solomon built a temple, a permanent house of God that replaced the Tabernacle. It lasted until it was looted by the Babylonians in 598 and then utterly destroyed in 587.

The Second Temple was built on the ruins of the first after the return from Babylonian captivity between 520-516 BC. It was a disappointment to anyone who remembered the first one.

Around 20 BC, King Herod the Great tore down the Second Temple in order to make room for a more impressive temple and thus legitimize his own reign. This is the one Jesus cleansed in today's reading. This Temple lasted until 70 AD when the Romans sacked and destroyed Jerusalem.

From 1200 BC to 70AD, the tabernacle and temple were understood to be the main place to encounter God—not the only place, but the main place. But by Jesus' time, the temple had become corrupt. It had become a place of political and economic oppression.

So in Jesus, the Word made flesh, God came in judgement and cleansed the temple. And then Jesus makes a cryptic announcement that he can rebuild the place in three days.

GOSPEL: The disciples didn't put all the clues together until after the resurrection, but Jesus was announcing that he had replaced the temple as the place to encounter God.

This was foreshadowed in John 1: the word became flesh and dwelt (pitched tent, tabernacled) among us.

SUDDEN SHIFT: This is a theological revolution. But the revolution didn't stop there.

UNPACKING: In 1 Corinthians, Paul names both the church as a congregation (3:16-17) and the Christian as an individual (6:18-19) as temples within which the Holy Spirit dwells.

As we welcome new people into the presence of this gathered congregation, and as we encounter them as we go about our lives—we should ask ourselves a question:

Will they encounter God in us? They should. Let us make it so.

Amen.

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