

Devotions for the Week of March 24, 2019

LARGE-PRINT

3rd Sunday of Lent

North East United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Sunday, March 24, 2019

Read John 2:13-22; Jeremiah 7:11.

This week we look at Jesus cleansing the Temple of the moneychangers and sellers of sacrificial animals. Jesus makes a “*whip of cords*” and drives them out of the Temple, overturning the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus recognizes the immoral practice of selling unblemished animals for sacrifice at extravagant prices, as well as exchanging Roman coins for the imageless coins that were acceptable for the Temple tax at high exchange rates.

William Barclay explains...” *The Passover was the greatest of all Jewish feasts...and it was the dream and aim of Jews, no matter in what land they stayed, to celebrate at least one Passover in Jerusalem...There was a tax that every Jew over nineteen years of age must pay. That was the Temple tax. The tax was one half-shekel. It was equivalent to almost two days’ wages...the Temple tax had to be paid in either Galilean shekels or in shekels of the sanctuary. These were Jewish coins, and so could be used as a gift to the Temple; the other currencies were foreign and so were unclean; they might be used to pay ordinary debts, but not a debt to God...the moneychangers charged a commission for every half-shekel they changed...the money-changers made considerable capital ...on such a transaction the equivalent of one day’s wage...Besides the moneychangers there were also the sellers*

of oxen and sheep and doves...the law was that any animal offered in sacrifice must be perfect and unblemished...Temple authorities had appointed inspectors and a fee was charged for this inspection...a pair of doves could cost as much as fifteen times more inside the Temple than if it had been purchased outside..."

Barclay goes on to write, *"Here...was bare-faced extortion at the expense of the poor and humble pilgrims...a glaring social injustice aggravated by the fact that it was perpetrated in the name of pure religion...It was that which moved Jesus to flaming anger..."*

Our God and Savior is not only a God of love and forgiveness, but a God of justice and righteousness.

What issues exist in our community, our country, our world, in which we as Christians are called to stand up, to speak out? What has God laid upon your heart...what stirs your passions...what might God be calling you to speak up about? Let us not only speak words of love, but let us stand for what is right and just, making sure at all times that we are in line with God's Word. What does the Lord require of us? *"But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God"* (Micah 6:8).

Monday, March 25, 2019

Read Hosea 6:6; Psalm 51: 15-17; Matthew 23:27.

When Jesus enters the Temple, He doesn't simply see what is taking place around Him...men and women making sacrifices to God...the priests praying and blessing the people...Jesus sees beyond the outer trappings. Jesus sees beneath the busy and religious Temple courts. Jesus sees into the hearts of the worshippers, the hearts of the priests, the

religious authority. Jesus takes on the role of prophet, protesting against the profaning of the Temple, against debasing the worship of the Lord, against substituting ritual for devotion. As Jesus tells the Pharisees at another time, *“For you are like whitewashed tombs,”* beautiful on the outside, appearing to do all the right, religious actions and speech, yet inside your hearts are decaying and far away from God.

The moneychangers and animal merchants appear to be doing a service for those who have traveled far to worship and make sacrifice. It is a service encouraged by the priests. Yet, Jesus sees within and finds greed, selfishness, and injustice.

David understood this...In the Psalms he prayed, *“For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart...”* Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee that stood before the altar, praying before God, *“God, I thank you I am not like other men...”* Next to him, was a tax collector, who *“beat his breast”* and cried out to God, *“be merciful to me, a sinner.”* Jesus concludes His parable saying, *“I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 18: 9-14).

We must always remember it is not about what everyone sees on the outside, our doing the right and respectable and religious things expected of us...it is about what is on the inside, our hearts, a relationship with Jesus Christ. Out of that relationship our actions flow. God sees the heart.

Ask the tough question: When God looks at your heart, what does God see? Spend time in prayer with God and ask

Him to change and mold your heart into the likeness of the Savior's.

Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Read John 2:13-22.

As Paul C. Shupe writes, we must see “...*Jesus with the whip of cords in his hands and hearing him with the righteous judgment of God on his lips—knowing that he speaks for us, yes, and with us, but also to us and even against us.*” As Joseph D. Small writes, “*The specificity of Jesus’ prophetic act in cleansing the Temple also raises the question of ‘the cleansing of the church.’*”

Small goes on to lift up a 17th century motto—“*The church reformed always to be reformed according to the Word of God.*” Speaking about this motto, Small points out how many times the church attempts to “*reform with organizational and programmatic changes...ignoring Parkinson’s law, ‘A diseased institution cannot reform itself’...The church is to be reformed, to be acted upon, not to reform itself.*” The reform for the Church will come from outside as God enacts upon His creation, His “*bride of Christ.*”

As Shupe points out, we must take time to “*imagine Jesus entering our own sanctuaries, overturning our own cherished rationalizations, and driving us out in the name of God.*”

If Jesus were to enter our churches or our homes, what would He say...what would He drive out? These are tough and disturbing questions that require great honesty and self-examination. This is what the season of Lent is about. Pray and ask God to show you areas in the church or in your life that need to be “*driven out,*” that the church and your family may be more in tune and more intimate with Christ.

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Read Matt. 10:34-9; 2 Cor. 5:17 & 3:16-18; Heb. 4:12; Phil. 3:21.

The title for this past Sunday's message was "*Holy Havoc: A Whip of Cords For Then & Now.*" When Jesus comes into our lives, as I shared in the message on the 1st Sunday of Lent, "*God sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts and immediately begins an "upheaval" and "reorganization." God begins a transformation. As Paul wrote, "the old life is gone; a new life has begun." Suddenly behaviors and thoughts we have practiced are seen in a different light, priorities are realigned with God's Word, practices are changed, forgiveness is given and sought out...We begin to look at everything different, through the eyes of God. Our lives are truly "reorganized" as God takes us through a metamorphosis. For us, this is not a forty-day wilderness experience as in the life of Jesus, one who was without sin, but for us it is a life-long process, involving our surrendering to God and wrestling for God's meaning afresh every day. We must allow God to "rip" away what we know or think we know...we must allow God to "tear apart" our hearts and remold our hearts to be more in line with Him...we must allow God to transform us and make us new.*" The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit create "*Holy Havoc*" in our lives, just as Jesus did that day in the Temple, as He turned over the tables and scattered the livestock.

God is about "*transforming*" us, from "*one degree of glory to another*" into the likeness of His Son. His Word, Christ, is like a "*two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" God wants us, like Paul, to be able to say that we are new creations, the old has gone.

Don't be afraid of the "*Holy Havoc*" God's Word, His Holy Spirit, and His Son, Jesus Christ, cause in your life. God is molding you into the likeness of His Son. God is preparing you for the tasks ahead. God is asking that you remove those actions and things from your life that stand in the way of being fully immersed in a relationship with Him. Allow God to create "*Holy Havoc*" in your life, knowing that He will walk with you through it and bring you to the other side where you will find peace and purpose. Pray and ask God to move in your life and continue to process of "*reorganization*," helping you become more like Jesus.

Thursday, March 28, 2019

Read John 2:13-22.

Jesus says, "*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" We are told by John that Jesus is speaking of the Temple of His body, His upcoming death, and resurrection. The disciples, at the time, do not understand His words, and perhaps, like the Pharisees, thought Jesus was speaking of the actual Temple in Jerusalem, which took "*forty-six years to build.*" We are told that the disciples don't understand Jesus' words until after the Resurrection and Easter Sunday.

"*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*" Lent offers us an opportunity to ask whether we may be "*destroying*" the temple.

Are we destroying our witness by actions that are contrary to God and His Word? Are we destroying the "*temple of the Holy Spirit*" by failing to care for our bodies, filling our lungs with smoke or our insides with alcohol or drugs, overeating or failing to exercise? Are we destroying the "temple," the church, by fostering unforgiveness, breeding division, holding back

change and the movement of the Holy Spirit? Are we destroying the “temple” of the family, by not loving our wives like Christ loved the church, not reaching out to our husbands, not holding in our arms our children? Pray about how God wants you to build up the “*temple*” rather than tear it down...ask God to show you how, through action or inaction, you are destroying His Temple. If God convicts you of an area in your life where you have fallen short, seek His forgiveness and ask God to help you have the strength to make changes in your spirit, your actions, your habits, so the Temple may be built up and He may be the “*cornerstone*.”

Friday, March 29, 2019

Read John 2:13-22; Hebrews 10:1-25.

William Barclay explains that Jesus also cleanses the Temple to show that animal sacrifice is irrelevant. He writes, “*For centuries the prophets had been saying exactly that. ‘What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? Says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats...bringing offerings is futile’ (Isaiah 1: 11-13). ‘For on the day that I brought your ancestors out of the land of Egypt, I did not speak to them or command them concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices’ (Jeremiah 7:22). ‘With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him’ (Hosea 5:6). ‘Though they offer choice sacrifices, though they eat flesh, the Lord does not accept them’ (Hosea 8:13). ‘For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt-offering, you would not be pleased’ (Psalm 51: 16). There was a chorus of prophetic voices telling of the sheer irrelevance of the burnt offerings and the animal sacrifices which smoked continuously*

upon the altar of Jerusalem. Jesus acted as he did to show that no sacrifice of any animal can ever put a person right with God.”

Christ is the ultimate sacrifice...the writer of Hebrews states, *“By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”* Because of Christ’s death and sacrifice, we can *“draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith”* to God, with boldness because of the *“blood of Christ.”* Jesus is the Passover lamb.

Give God thanks for this tremendous gift...that through Christ we can have forgiveness and redemption...we can come into the presence of God *“with rejoicing.”* Thank God for the gift of His Son. Recognize in your prayers & actions, the ultimate sacrifice.

Saturday, March 30, 2019

Read Mark 8:31-38.

When Jesus explained to His disciples that He must be killed, Peter took Him aside and *“rebuked”* Him. Jesus told Peter, *“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”* Jesus then went on to explain to His followers that anyone who wants to follow Him, *“must deny themselves and take up their cross.”* We must surrender to God, placing our thoughts, not on the world, but on Christ and His calling on our lives.

Paul C. Shupe talks about how every church has a cross as its central symbol, but asks, *“Where are our own crosses?”* He goes on to say that *“perhaps what we need is a multitude of cross, one for each of us, at the back door of our sanctuaries, to be taken up as we return to the world of home and family, work and commerce, service and lay...Opportunities are daily before*

us, times when we may give our lives sacrificially to acts of love, compassion, justices, and peace, even in the face of the same imperial forces of sin and death that confronted Jesus. In this season, we are wise to ponder, not only the cross or crucifix in our sanctuaries, but the picture of Jesus on the road to Jerusalem, calling all his disciples to take up our own crosses and to walk with him in paths of love and service.”

If you can take time, bring up the following YouTube video with the song, “*With Every Act of Love*”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4bB7BUxBbY>. It speaks of walking a path of love and service. It speaks of how with every act of love the Kingdom of God is built up and heaven touches the earth. The songwriter sings, “*With every act of love...Jesus, help us carry You...Alive in us, Your light shines through...With every act of love...We bring the kingdom come.*”

How might you carry Jesus to others, allowing His light to shine through? What opportunities are before you to live your life in acts of sacrificial love and service? How might you carry your cross this week? Keep your eyes open this week and pray that God will show you where you can be His disciple.

And remember to invite someone to church tomorrow.