

Holy Havoc: A Whip of Cords for Then & Now
3rd Sunday of Lent
Message for North East United Methodist Church
March 24, 2019
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."

So the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

-John 2: 13-22 (NKJV)

Jesus travels throughout Galilee and the surrounding countryside, preaching to the masses of the Kingdom of God, healing, performing miracles... Jesus heals the demon-possessed, calms the storm, walks on water, brings back a young girl from the dead, and feeds five thousand with a few fish and loaves. Many touch Him and are made well. The blind are healed.



The disciples travel with him...witness these miraculous moments...many flock to see Jesus...the streets are full every time He arrives in a town with onlookers, men and women who just want to touch the “*hem of His garment.*”

At any moment, Jesus could have probably raised a revolution against the Roman oppressor...He certainly had the followers...He also had many enemies...

Jesus knew that He would have to die...the mission God had Him on would cost Him His life. Jesus explains to His disciples that “...*the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.*”

Only three years in ministry, Jesus sets His face “*resolutely*” to Jerusalem, to His death, to fulfilling His mission.



It was a mission Jesus began at His baptism as the skies are “*torn apart*” and the Holy Spirit descends...



Jesus was driven into the wilderness...He came forth and ministered to God's people...He began the journey to the cross...the mission God had given Him to fulfill...Jesus would not give up... not so He Himself could be lifted up but so you and I could be lifted up...

Jesus was able to say from the cross, *"It is finished."*

Last Sunday, in speaking about Jesus' baptism and how the Holy Spirit comes into our lives, I wrote, ***"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."*

This is what Jesus does as He enters the Temple and, filled with "zeal," with a "whip of cords," drives the moneychangers out.



Jesus, like the Holy Spirit, is bringing “*upheaval*” and “*reorganization*.” Jesus is bringing “*Holy Havoc*.”

Henry Blackaby writes, “*The love that God focuses on your life is an everlasting love. Because of that love, He has drawn you to Himself. He has drawn you with cords of love when you were not His friend, when you were His enemy. He gave His own Son to die for you.*”

God draws us with “*cords*” of love and Jesus drives out the moneychangers with a “*whip of cords*.”

The message last week reminded us...

I John 3: 1 - “*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*”

And as children we must remember, **Proverbs 3: 11-12 (NLT)** - “*My child, don’t reject the LORD’s discipline, and don’t be upset when he corrects you. For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.*”

God’s love is both a cord that draws us to Him and a cord that drives out that which is not Holy.

When Jesus comes into our lives, He fills us with His love, but He also creates “*Holy Havoc*”...

Paul tells us in **I Corinthians 6:19 (NIV)** – “*Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.*”

Like the Temple in Jerusalem, Christ enters and cleanses us of all which is not of God. “*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers’ money and overturned the tables.*”



William Barclay describes that day Jesus entered the Temple. He writes, *“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.



Two questions that today’s Gospel reading raises for me are: (1) Are we willing to allow God to “*cleanse*” us and His church? And (2) How might we be “*destroying*” His Temple?

First, Are we willing to allow God to “*cleanse*” us and His church?

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.*”

If Jesus entered our homes, our workplaces, our churches...what would He see and hear...what would He “*drive out*”...what would He “*cleanse*”...what would He “*reorganize*” and “*make new?*”

Such questions make up the very fabric of Lent...they are tough and even disturbing questions that cause us to reprioritize and reexamine our lives with honesty and humility. Such questions lead us to repentance and redemption.

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

On the internet, there were many pictures of Jesus “*cleansing*” the temple, overturning the moneychangers’ tables, driving people out in the name of God...I looked for a picture that would symbolize Jesus “*cleansing*” our hearts, our homes, our lives...driving out that which was sinful, unholy, unjust...The best picture I found that symbolized the “*cleansing*” Jesus has already begun...already accomplished if we are willing to embrace it...the “*cleansing*” Jesus has done and is ready to do in this, our temple of the Holy Spirit...was this picture...



I John 1:7 (NKJV) – “*But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

Are we willing to allow God to “*cleanse*” us and His church?

I John 1:9 (KJV) – “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”

Are we willing to allow God to “*cleanse*” us and His church of unforgiveness, bitterness, judgment, unrighteousness, selfishness, blind adherence to tradition, pride, distrust, greed, dishonesty, immorality, prejudice, and heartless praise?

Remember the story I shared that Max Lucado wrote about a time when he turned to give his daughter an ice cream and found her mouth filled with sand...he took her over to the water

fountain to wash the dirt out of her mouth...Lucado describes how God does the same for us...He writes, *“We don’t enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. “I can eat dirt if I want to!” we pout and proclaim. Which is true—we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer.”*

And this is important to remember...The *“cleansing,”* God’s *“holy havoc,”* His *“making new,”* must come from the outside not from within.

In a culture filled with self-help books and seminars, this truth is often forgotten, as we grab hold of the next best program and attempt to improve our situation ourselves. ***“Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple...”***

Joseph D. Small comments on a 17th century motto—***“The church reformed always to be reformed according to the Word of God.”*** He 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, the reform of each of us, will come from outside as we surrender and are willing, as God enacts upon His creation.



We must surrender...



We must be willing to allow God to enter the Temple of our lives and act...with both Holy Love and Holy Havoc...we must allow God to *“cleanse”* us of that which stands between us and God...we must allow God to *“reorganize”* us and set us on the road to fulfilling His plans for our lives...

Are we willing to allow God to *“cleanse”* us and His church?

Secondly, **How might we be “destroying” His Temple?**

After turning over the moneychangers’ tables, driving out the sellers of sacrificial animals...Jesus was confronted by the Jewish leaders...*Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”*

Jesus knew that His body would be destroyed, would be scarred and hammered upon...and after three days He would be resurrected...sin would be defeated...The Jewish leaders and others had destroyed the sanctity of the Temple with their immoral practices and greed...Jesus lashed out against such injustice...He pointed to a new reality where there would no longer be need for sellers of doves and oxen in the Temple...the system of sacrifice would no longer be necessary...the Temple of the body of Christ would replace the need for sacrifice...the sacrificial lamb would be killed...**Hebrews 10: 11-12** – *“And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God.”*



John 1:29 (NKJV) – *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”*



Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Lent offers us the opportunity to ask the probing question, **How might we be “destroying” His Temple?**

- *Are we destroying the “temple” of our witness in the community 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 our marriage, by not loving our wives like Christ loved the church, by not loving our husbands like God has loved us?
- *Are we destroying the “*temple*” of family, by not holding our children in our arms, supporting and encouraging them, teaching them of the love and instructions of God?
- *Are we destroying the “*temple*” of our minds, filling them with negative thoughts, violent and pornographic images, anger and gossip?
- *Are we destroying the “*temple*” of our relationship with God by failing to sit with Him, to read God’s Word, to be obedient, and to pray, becoming more intimate with Him?
- *Are we working to “*build up*” the “*temples*” in our lives, rather than “*tear*” them down...Are we seeking God, asking Him to show us how, through our actions or inactions, we are “*tearing down*” the “*temples*” that surround us?

In 1818, Ignaz Phillip Semmelweis was born into a world of dying women.



The finest hospitals lost one out of six young mothers to the scourge of "childbed fever." A doctor's daily routine began in the dissecting room where he performed autopsies. From there he made his way to the hospital to examine expectant mothers without ever pausing to wash his hands. Dr. Semmelweis was the first man in history to associate such examinations with the resultant infection and death. His own practice was to wash with a chlorine solution, and after eleven years and the delivery of 8,537 babies, he lost only 184 mothers--about one in fifty.

He spent the vigor of his life lecturing and debating with his colleagues. Once he argued, "Puerperal fever is caused by decomposed material, conveyed to a wound . . . I have shown how it can be prevented. I have proved all that I have said. But while we talk, talk, talk, gentlemen,

women are dying. I am not asking anything world shaking. I am asking you only to wash...For God's sake, wash your hands."



But virtually no one believed him. Doctors and midwives had been delivering babies for thousands of years without washing, and no outspoken Hungarian was going to change them now!

Semmelweis died insane at the age of 47, his wash basins discarded, his colleagues laughing in his face, and the death rattle of a thousand women ringing in his ears.

"Wash me!" was the anguished prayer of King David. "Wash!" was the message of John the Baptist. "***Unless I wash you, you have no part with me,***" said the towel-draped Jesus to Peter.

Without our being washed clean, we all die from the contamination of sin. ***For God's sake, wash.***

May we be willing to allow God to "*cleanse*" us and His church.

May we be willing to look closely at how we might be destroying the "*temples*" of God in our lives and take action.

And may we recognize, that any reform, any reorganization, any redemption, any renewal will come from outside, not from our own efforts and designs. We must allow God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit to enter with both a *cord* that draws us to Him and a *cord* that drives out that which is not Holy.

This Lent, may we surrender...



May we be willing to allow Christ to come into our lives, our families, our churches, our hearts and create “*Holy Havoc*”...causing us to ask the tough questions and to mature in our faith...molding us into the likeness of Christ, Himself...