

SO, WHAT'S IN YOUR TEMPLE?

Last week's Gospel was about Jesus going into the temple and driving the various groups out of the temple, because they had made the temple "*a of place business*". One translation gives us quite modern term saying "*stop turning my father's house into a shopping mall*".

Now when you think of a temple, what picture comes into your mind? Several of the pictures that may come to mind are the Jewish temple, of which the most famous was King Solomon's temple, also the various temples of the ancient world built by the Romans and Greeks.

It seems to me in our world today our "temples" are these stadiums we have built, some costing one billion dollars, and worship on a Sunday at a football game! Other temples may not be as easy to name as a place of worship, but it can be the job, or anything that will take us away from true worship of God.

Look back at the temple in Jesus' day. The people were selling animals for sacrifice. There were also the money changers who because so many people came from different locations they needed to change their money to the temple currency. The religious rulers permitted these groups to operate provided they paid a franchise fee. The one group was selling animals at inflated prices and the blemished animals were not fit for sacrifice. Meanwhile the money changers were charging excessive exchange rates because the roman coins used outside the temple were not permitted for use in the temple. Jesus walks into this scene hearing all the commotion of conducting business, arguing over exchange rates, bartering prices, then on top of that the smell of the animals. Lastly, He sees the greed of the merchants in dealing with the people. *The temple was where people believed in Jesus' day that God dwelled. The focus was not on worship.* And can you image the attitude people had when once they entered the temple enclosures to worship after dealing with the moneychangers and the other merchants?

Interesting story, but what has that to do with me, today? We don't worship in a temple and we certainly don't sacrifice animals!!

Let's look back at the latter part of the Gospel reading, Verse 21 "but he was speaking of the temple of his body". In Colossians 3:1, it says "*since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven...*", **therefore aren't our bodies temples too?** Many verses in the New Testament speak directly to us about this being true. Verses in 1 Corinthians Chapters 3, 6, and 7 as well as in Ephesians 2. One of the more well-known verses about our bodies being a temple is from 1 Peter 2:5 "*and you are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple.*"

Or 1 Corinthians 3:16 *“don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the spirit of God lives in you?”*

Then the question arises **“so, what's in your temple?”** We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and Jesus told his disciples, us, that He would come and abide with us. **What kind of temple does Jesus and the Holy Spirit have to live in? Do we have “tables” that need to be over turned? Do we need a spring cleaning or a spring cleansing? What better time is there than Lent to focus on these topics?**

For Lent, if we take it seriously is a time to take an inventory, making preparation for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. How can we do it? We can with a cleansing, which by definition is a process of getting rid of things that do not belong in a place. Unlike cleaning which is a process that only takes something and removes the dirt to make it look and smell and feel better again. There is no removal of it.

Cleaning is a physical act whereby cleansing is a spiritual act or process. In today's reading when we read the verses again we hear Jesus say *“take these things away”*, not just straighten up things or leaving them where they already are.

It is likely when the moneychangers and the like started out on the temple ground there weren't many, but supply and demand drove the religious leaders to bring in more and more until it got to the place it was when Jesus entered. We too, can let things into our temple and before you know it through neglect and not addressing situations our hearts, the very holy of holies, can harden and sin can “rob” us by accepting that which is blemished and not fit to occupy our temples.

What “tables” have we set up in our temple? What do we have “caged” with the mistaken belief it is under control in our temple?

The tables I suggest today we may not, at times care to admit they exist, but in our humanness we can “serve” from one of these tables!

The first table is the table of “complaining and grumbling”. It may be a small table but if we do not cleanse our temple it can become larger just like the number of the moneychangers in the temple we have read about. It's too hot in here, it's too cold in here, the pastor's sermon is “picking on me”, the service is too long, it's at the wrong time and I could go on and on, because we all know we have heard such things or maybe we have voiced them ourselves! In James 5:9 *“do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged; for the judge is standing at the door”*

Another table we may have allowed to be set up in our temple is the table of “criticizing”.

Unlike complaining and grumbling this can be much more personal. Granted our criticizing can be critical of “things” around the church, but many times it is directed at a person – the pastor, the choir director, the organist, the Sunday school teachers or others.

Just like in Jesus’ time when the problems was within the church, not outside it, we too can be our own worst enemy. Do we think that if we go out and complain to neighbors or outsiders about the church or its people that that will encourage anyone to come and visit? Ephesians 4:29 *“don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.”*

The third table is the table of “unforgiveness”. The last Bible study we had was on this subject and from the sharing in the study, people admitted it is a tough, really tough thing to do. Seemingly impossible situations came up, but when we look toward Jesus on the cross we hear an answer loud and clear – forgive them.

It was once said that unforgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die...it only kills you the table of bitterness can take root and the Bible reminds us in Ephesians 4:30-32 *“don’t grieve God. Don’t break his heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for Himself. Don’t take such a gift for granted. Make a clean break with all cutting, backbiting, and profane talk. Be gentle with one another, sensitive. Forgive one another as quickly and thoroughly as God in Christ forgave”.*

A table we cannot allow to set up in our temple is a table of “indifference”. We cannot let a lack of interest, concern, or sympathy enter our spirit. We must, by the grace of God, maintain in our temple a vibrant love of God with all our heart, mind and soul and, and love our neighbor.

We must maintain a zeal for people of all age groups; with attention to the young for they are the future! If we do allow this table to be set up there is a promise Jesus spoke of to help us in Matthew 13:15 *“for this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.”*

From these tables of our temple we can pick up that such things begin in the heart, the very dwelling place of the Holy Spirit and Jesus. That is the reason it is so important for us to cleanse our temple.

How? I John 1:9 *“God is faithful and reliable. If we confess our sins, he forgives them and cleanses us from everything we’ve done wrong.”* Our temple can be a place ready for his indwelling when our

heart is cleansed - the Psalm *“create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within me”*, cleanse our mouth from all that speech that is not for building up someone.

We must release unforgiveness and bitterness for it only holds us a prisoner, unable to fully do our ministry. There is this idea I came across in reading. We must learn to laugh at ourselves and life. Psalm 28:7 says *“the Lord strengthens and protects me; I trust in Him with all my heart. I am rescued and my heart is full of joy; I will sing to Him in gratitude.”*

In closing when we look back at this event one more time there is a question to ask, however the answer can easily be misunderstood. What really did cause Jesus’ anger to arise? A quick answer would be all the business being conducted. However, if we dig deeper we discover that His anger arose because of the “religion of convenience”.

The people bought their animals the last minute instead of planning and bring their own. In exchanging their money the people gave to God the least of their coins. Their idea was to claim spirituality without any real sacrifice, and to have spiritual progress without effort.

How many people today take that view when they arrive for worship on a Sunday? I’ll sit in the pew and listen to the service and somehow, somehow absorb it and become more spiritual with very little effort. The people of Jesus’ day didn’t want to put forth the effort nor make any sacrifice.

They hadn’t heard of Burger King yet, but they certainly “wanted their way”. **In this season of Lent as we look toward Easter and a time of self-examination, do we have “tables” in our temple that needs overturning? Do we need to do a spring cleansing? The question is - so what is in your temple?**

Amen.