Text: John 2:13-22

**Introduction**

Preaching on the cleansing of the Temple from John is complex. Made more complex as we are given it from the Gospel of John. Part of that complexity is that there are two immediate uses which I have heard which I think are just terrible. There are those who are always itching for a fight. And every square inch of the universe is claimed by God. So, we are always justified in making a whip of cords and chasing people out. The ditch on the other side that immediately comes up is the assertion that we are not Jesus and while his zeal was appropriate, ours never is.

Both of those applications are focusing upon when can we act like Jesus. And I just don’t think our gospel text is about that. It is not a text about our actions, but about who Jesus himself is. The disciples don’t remember his actions exactly, or more explicitly they never forgot those. What they remembered is “this it was written, ‘zeal for you house will consume me.’”. What they remembered is “what he had said, and they believed the Scripture.” It is a text revealing who Jesus is and what he is about.

**Text**

John’s version of the cleansing makes it more complex, because John clearly ripped the event out of time order. Unless you want to say that Jesus did something like this twice, which I find difficult. John moves it for theological purpose. In the synoptics, the cleansing of the temple takes place at the end of Palm Sunday – or in Mark the next morning. Jesus is lead into Jerusalem welcomed as the Son of David with Hosannas. And where might you expect him to go? The palace or the courthouse or Pilate’s residence. The place where an incoming King might go to assert his authority. But Jesus goes to the temple and cleanses it. Which of course riles us the chief priests who come out and sputter at him “who the heck do you think you are?” And Jesus spends Monday to Wednesday of Holy Week in the temple proving just who he is. Answering all questions. Silencing all challengers. Gathering such a crowd that they could do nothing but stew, and look for a better time to arrest Jesus.

And if you are on a historical quest, those three probably have the time right. Cause I can’t imagine the chief priests allowing anyone to “cleanse the temple” without grabbing him. Which is what they do Thursday evening. And the fake charges that are brought against him center on the “destroying the temple” saying. But John takes this episode and it is the very first thing that Jesus does after the Wedding at Cana. Jesus has told Mary, “It is not my time.” Mary tells the servants to “do what he says.” And Jesus performs his first sign. In John they aren’t miracles, but signs. And immediately it is Passover, he is in Jerusalem, in the temple cleansing it. John ripped the event out of time for a theological purpose. Why is Jesus here? Who is this Jesus? This event, placed as the first act of his public ministry, is the key to understanding.

The synoptics have Jesus upset that a house of prayer has been turned into a den of robbers. But the emphasis in John is on neither prayer nor on the robbers. Instead, “do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” The Zeal that consumes him is for His Father’s house. And the Zeal is that His Father’s house is not a place of barter or exchange or of purchase.

**Christology**

This story is a revelation of who Jesus is.

First, he is the son. Everyone recognizes that the Temple was to be the “House of God.” Jesus words and actions are part of the revelation that he is the Son of God. The disciples remember the Psalm quotation – it’s from Psalm 69:9 – which is surrounded by lines like our Introit which we immediately take as prophecies of the passion. But Jesus’ zeal for the House of God is revelation of God as his Father. The man who suffers is also the Son. Something that the disciples could only understand in hindsight.

Second, what is supposed to take place in the temple, in the House of the Father, is not a trade. Not all the blood of beasts on Israel’s altars slain, could give the guilty conscience peace or wipe away the stain. Not the oxen or sheep or pigeons, not the prayers, not the money exchanged – nothing that was brought or bought or traded – was God entering into a contract with anybody. The atonement, the absolution, are by grace. In faith would Israel bring the sacrifices considering that God would be faithful to his promises. And now in Jesus Christ, God has once against come be with his people, in his house and to cleanse it.

But his own would not receive him. You can’t put new wine in old wineskins. The temple of God’s residence would not longer be made of stones, but of flesh. That is the third things that Jesus reveals. The Jews press him, “What sign do you show us to do these things?” The synoptics have them much more peeved asking by what authority. The background to that question is that he can’t possibly have any authority. But here the Jews are open to something, if he can produce a sign. How do we know you are the Son of God? How do we know that God deals with us by grace, and not by trade?

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

The resurrection is the sign. “He was speaking about the temple of his body.” Christ is risen.

The true House of God that Christ came to cleanse was us, was this flesh. To make is a suitable dwelling for the Holy Spirit. That He grants us this spirit – this cleansing - by grace is proven by the resurrection. That Jesus was who he said he was, that he had the authority, is proved by his resurrection.

This is who Jesus is, the one who cleanses us all. Not by trade, but by his grace. Who takes up residence in our hearts as the dwelling of God. Who was and is and always will be the Son.

**Moral**

If we are going to take a moral from the story, it isn’t about if or when we should craft whips and flip tables. No, I think there is a direct moral that should take. “The disciples remembered.” What did the disciples remember? They always remembered the testimony of the scriptures. They remembered it is written. “They remember he had said this, and they believed the Scriptures and the word that Jesus has spoken.”

John would end his gospel seemingly twice. “Jesus did many other signs…which are not written in this book, but these are written that you might believe.” And then he remembers another one, another resurrection appearance that he has to include. And then returns “there are many other things Jesus did, and if every one was written, the world could not contain the books.” Are we ever going to know everything about Jesus? No. But what we have been given is enough to believe.

The second instruction that we should take I believe is to take seriously that this flesh is the House of God. He though heavenly, high and holy, deigns to dwell with us most lowly.

**Eschatology**

Even though this heart and flesh shall fail. They have been cleansed. We have been buried with Christ, and so will be raised with him. The temple of the New Jerusalem is already visible. In you. Today we might be a bit like those who had seen the first temple returning from exile and seeing the second. This might not look like much right now. It might not look cleansed. It might not feel like where God would choose to dwell. But that is what Christ has revealed. We just have not seen it’s completion.

But Christ has. And the Scriptures we are told to remember recount it. And John himself saw it in his vision. No temple in the city, for the temple is God himself. No sun or moon, for the glory of God is its light. And those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life are there. Too many to number.

We acknowledge in baptism for the remission of sins – our cleansing.

And we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.