

Saint Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ - Rector

Scripture: John 2:13-22

“A Remnant”

The Temple in Jerusalem was instituted by God – to be for mankind a reminder of His presence and also of the heavenly Temple that will one day come to earth on God's Holy mountain. The Temple was the beating heart of Jerusalem and Judaism and was the place that people would come for the “high holy days” to feel closer to God and make sacrifices in His Name. The problem is – people.

Remember God had initiated the sacrificial system – it was what the Temple was there for – linking Israel with God, hour by hour and day by day, and that perfect sacrifices without blemish were to be made. If people could not change their money to the Temple coinage or buy doves, even for a short while they could not offer sacrifice. Sadly, the sacrificial system depended on money changing and animal purchases. You could not bring your own animals because during a long journey anything could happen to the animal and then what? The money changers were also important because you could only pay the Temple tax, which was paid annually by every Jewish male 20 years of age or older, only with the coins of the Temple. With such a large group of travelers and because of the seasonal nature of the celebration – the marketplace in the outer courts of the Temple I am sure became a place of exploitation.

You can just imagine what Jesus thinks of what the Temple itself had become. Clearly, He regards it as corrupt, and under God's judgment. The trade, the market-place atmosphere, is not what it was supposed to be there for. “*Jesus made a whip of cords and drove all from the Temple area.*” (John 2:15) The holiness of God was at stake and so Jesus took fast and furious action. The conflict with the Temple leaders and especially the High Priest are about to come to a head, and the leadership is going to want to kill Jesus – and they were watching Him and waiting, mounting up ammunition to arrest Jesus and put Him to death.

The first Temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians, and then rebuilt through the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah and others, but certainly not to the glorious, magnificent splendor of that first Temple, built by David's son, Solomon. Years later King Herod wanted to try and restore the Temple to glorious splendor and so he started work, replacing foundation stones, and bringing in over 10,000 workmen to rebuild and enlarge the Temple. The work outlasted the life of Herod and one of his sons was left to finishing the job – taking 46 years to complete. That is why they were so surprised at Jesus' promise to “*raise it again in three days.*” To most Jews and the upper classes that controlled Jerusalem's Temple these words that Jesus said would sound blasphemous. They did not realize that what Jesus was doing was answering the threats that they had been making against His life – and that He would rise again after three days. Ironically, three years later Jesus would be accused at His trial of saying that He would destroy the Temple and raise it again, and then He would be mocked with this repeated charge as He hung on the cross. There was no pleasing the Pharisees and Sadducees – or the Priests of the Temple, and they would have Him followed in hopes of catching Jesus doing something they did not approve of.

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Jesus knew that their clock was ticking and so His words were letting these people know that the Temple – the center of their lives and business would soon be destroyed. Jesus knew that in 70 AD the Romans would not leave even a stone standing of this center of their civilization – also alluding to His murder at their hands. Jesus wanted to set straight their focus – that their lives should be about prayer and relationship with God – our heavenly Father – and not about the ritual. While rituals and liturgy are very important – they are not the ONLY thing – they can become an idol in some people's lives, improperly taking a place above their original purpose – which is to deepen their relationship with and worshipping God Himself.

This morning we prayed the Decalogue – the Ten Commandments, and we just heard in our Old Testament lesson from Exodus 20 – that God reminded His people where He should be in their lives – in our lives. The first 2 commandments make this clear -"*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*" "*You shall have no other gods before me.*" "*You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*" "*You shall not bow down to them or worship them.*" (Exodus 20:1-2) When the world lets “stuff” – whether rite or ritual take a place higher than where God should be in the lives of His people – God lets the people know. Jesus reminds the world “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.*” “*This is the first and greatest commandment.*” “*And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:37-39 NIV) Jesus’ words echo what God Himself told Moses in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 - a prayer called the “Shema” “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*” “*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” This prayer is found on the doorpost of every Jewish home –and many Christian believers as well, rolled inside a mezuzah. They would kiss their hand and touch the mezuzah in leaving or coming through their doorway. This prayer has been prayed by Jewish people for thousands of years – and in it God is saying two things – He is one God (we know this in the Trinity) and He is telling the world where He must be in our lives - #1! God has to be first – He is number ONE! And then - Jesus added for us to love one another as well. The first four commandments that He gave to Moses deal in a vertical format with the relationship of mankind with God – a vertical relationship – while the next six are specifically how we are to deal with one another – a horizontal relationship – “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” Jesus cleared the Temple that day, I believe, to remind the world to get right with God – in prayer, in communication, and in worship. In doing so – He also reminds us to get right with our relationships with one another – God first, then each other, then ourselves. The Apostle Paul reminds Jesus’ followers to clear our own temple: “*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;*” “*you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) In cleansing your temple – Love God, love your neighbor – but remember to love and forgive yourself. This Lent please make it a priority to be clearing your temple! It is funny how people will go around pointing fingers at other – mostly because they have not been able to forgive themselves.

God always has a remnant. His plan will never be stopped. Remember the account of Abraham pleading with God not to destroy people from Genesis 18 of Sodom and Gomorrah, when he

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was visited by 2 angels and the Lord. *"The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. Then Abraham approached him and said: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?"* (Genesis 18:22-23) Abraham asked the Lord if He would spare the people if He found 50 righteous people. They were not found, and it continued all the way down to 10 righteous people – when God said, *"for the sake of ten, I will not destroy it."* We constantly see the character of God. He was willing to listen. He is so willing to put up with our behavior. The money changers in the Temple are no different than people today. Different coins... different faces... same ungodly behavior.

You would think that God would be fed up and give up on us – but He is not fed up with us. He loves us too much to give up on us – sending His Son, Jesus or Nazareth to rescue us. So do not be like the moneychangers in the Temple. Do everything that you can to be godly sons and daughters. Make God proud of you!