Lent 3B 2021 Jesus cleared His Father’s house to make room for the One Sacrifice

John 2: 13-25

Our ears are quite accustomed to hearing the importance of washing hands and sanitizing everything that comes into the house. The covid pandemic has popularized the opportunity to order our groceries on line. Then came the advice to wash everything.

Cleaning and sanitizing is certainly part of what Jesus did to His father’s house when He drove out the money-changers together with the animals. Before this holy house cleaning, the foul smell of manure, was only exceeded by the stench of human greed by the money-changers.

Both smells were detestable in God’s nostrils. God’s house was supposed to be the quiet place where God met his children to give them grace and peace. This gift-giving of God was then supposed to spawn the prayer of thanks and praise in the hearts of his grateful people. How could this happen in the midst of bleating sheep, lowing oxen, fluttering pigeons and money-changers yelling above the crowd like hot dog peddlers at a ball game. “Get your dogs here!”

Clearing of animals to make way for the True Sacrifice

God’s house had become a zoo and a den of thieves. How did it come to this? Did God Himself **not** command his people to offer the sacrifices as prescribed in Leviticus? How inconvenient it would have been for Mary and Joseph to haul pigeons from Nazareth for the purification offering instead of simply buying them there in Jerusalem.

Did God **not** order the temple tax to be collected to support the most important work there? Exodus 30:13 orders the census tax of a half-shekel to be given as an offering to the Lord. What would the Jewish pilgrims do who came from all over the Mediterranean world with no local currency? How would they pay the temple tax without a currency exchange?

So we might say that these things may have started out as good in accordance to the law, but over many centuries, got out of hand. The focus was lost. God’s desire for his children to worship was pushed out of the way to make room for the selling of animals and for the exchange of currency.

This was not the first time that God’s house needed a thorough cleaning. Josiah, Hezekiah and Elijah carried out reforms in their day. They were zealous in returning the hearts of God’s people to their heavenly father. They wanted to cut out the extravagant excesses, remove the foreign idols, and return God’s word to its proper prominent place in worship.

They all suffered for it. The powers that be were offended. How dare anyone overturn our traditions, endanger our cash flow, and belittle our importance for the people?

So, when Jesus came to overturn the tables of money-changers and drive out the animals marked for sale, there was hell to pay. The Jewish power-brokers demanded a sign to legitimize these violent actions. Now to be honest, their request for a miracle from Jesus was not wrong. They were entrusted with the smooth operating of the temple. Someone had to oversee its massive operations.

Not a Power Move

In fact Jesus does give them a sign. His body, the real temple of God, where humanity and divinity meet in one person, would be destroyed by their own hands, and yet, He will raise it in three days. His death and resurrection is God’s sign. Is there a greater one than this?

But the Jews who handed Jesus over to Pilate, taunted him on the cross, and then promoted lies that his disciples stole his body, were just as blind to His desire to clean up His father’s house.

They refused to believe in the Son of God. No sign in heaven or earth would change their minds. But that did not stop Jesus. His heart was burning to carry out his father’s plan of salvation. He did not want to show off his power or authority by upsetting the corrupt temple worship. His was not a power move, but one of fulfilling his father’s plan to drink the cup of wrath and to save His people.

This explains why Jesus had to drive out the sacrificial animals from his father’s house. Everyone of them had to be cleared out to make way for His sacrifice on the altar of His cross of suffering. He knew that He alone was the Lamb of God.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The One True Lamb of God was here. There was no longer a need for any other sacrifice. By our strongest most sincerer efforts, we could never cleanse ourselves. Salvation can never be accomplished by what we do or how sincere we are. But by the death of God’s lamb, the pure lamb, can all the bad smell of our sin be taken away. Only by the sweet fragrance of the pure blood of the ultimate paschal lamb, can the stench of our covetous love for money, power, and self-righteousness be cleaned away. And it has!

The death of the Pure Lamb of God ended the need for all animal sacrifices. The law was now fulfilled in Christ and His death has given us life. See what Zeal for the Lord’s house has done!

We misuse the temple cleaning by clubbing people who want to sell something in church. Our zeal can be misapplied and misused. Although it is not right to sell Tupperware in the narthex after service, or use our friends at church to promote our own private businesses, yet we miss the whole point of Jesus wanting to clear the way for His death and resurrection to be all that matters. Lord have mercy!

We also have lost sight of the importance of God’s word when it comes to how we manage and run his church. We are always in need of spiritual reform as we live in daily repentance. We too are swayed to concentrate more on what we do for God rather than what He has done. But that could never undo what was done on the cross, in the temple and in his tomb.

Jesus never came to impress anyone with his authority. He was not out to win popularity and to schmooze with the powers that be in the backrooms of the temple. He came to do his father’s will. He came as the one sacrifice for the life of the world. Of course all the animals had to go. Of course the money-changers had to go. See God’s lamb and rejoice in his love for you!