

**3-4 Sermons B18 Lent 3 Children's**Exodus 20:1-17Psalm 19:1-6John 2:13-22

Jesus made a lot of people very unhappy that day in the temple. If there had been a 911 emergency call system back then mall security would have had the local police there in minutes. Jesus most likely would have been arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, assault, cruelty to animals and destruction of property. At the very least he would have been put on a 72 hour hold, been funneled into a diversion program and enrolled in an anger management course. We can chuckle about that thought because none of us have been directly affected by his actions, but a lot of people were.

The merchants come to mind first. In modern day terms they were small businessmen engaged in what was a perfectly acceptable line of work. In fact, their trade was not only acceptable it was appreciated. The system of animal sacrifice originated with God's ancient commands to Israel as they wandered through the wilderness. People "got right" with God through this system. And, you couldn't just make your sacrifices anywhere. You had to make them at the temple in Jerusalem. If you were a Jew living in Egypt or even just up north in the Galilee you would appreciate not having to haul or drive your livestock over the miles, through the crowded streets and up the temple steps. The merchants, of course, inflated their prices because they could. But, who hasn't paid six dollars for a corn dog that should have cost no more than three dollars at the state fair? You pay for the convenience right?

Naturally, Jesus ticked off the religious/political/enterprise officials and hierarchy at the temple too. This was their gig, their venue, their show. The loss of income was one thing. The loss of face and the sheer humiliation of the terrorist attack was another. How does it look to the general public when the one institution that hasn't been totally infiltrated by the Roman occupation force suddenly appears vulnerable to attack as well. The temple and temple worship anchored the identity of the Jewish people. What did it mean to be a Jew without temple

worship? How would their religious practice and belief survive without this common place to gather?

It goes without saying that the money changers, the fellows who took in Roman coinage and exchanged it for shekels – at a significantly inflated rate of exchange ... it goes without saying that they were livid. What banker wouldn't be over the roof when their low investment high return system was disrupted? What could have been easier than sitting in the temple and having people line up to get the shekels because you had the most convenient currency exchange location around?

It's easy to see why Jesus' annoyed outburst that day ruffled the fine feathers of all the people benefiting from "the system" at the expense of others. But, I'm guessing that among the irritated we could also have found a significant number of "little ones" too. What if you had saved your pennies for the trip of a lifetime, kept travel expenses down and budgeted for what you knew would be outrageous prices for the things you needed to do your religious duty? Then, when you finally reached your destination with all you needed in hand and a warm devoted heart, some mad zealot ruined the whole experience. Just this week I read in the paper about a father who was over the roof when his family couldn't tour the museums in Boston because of fear of flooding in the underground parking garages. His response to being locked out was, "People who are worried about it should get a four wheel drive vehicle." Was he thinking clearly? Probably not. Was he mad that he couldn't have the experience that he wanted? Clearly he was.

Most people counted on the religious system and the business of the temple working the way it had for one thousand years. Most people didn't want their system undermined or overturned. How do we know that? Well, when push came to shove the crowds chose the system status quo over the radical outside influence and change. After all, they called for the he change agent to be crucified didn't they? They weren't really ready for something new.

Funny thing though ... Jesus wasn't really about calling for something new. He was, instead, calling for a return to the very basics ... pure worship over enterprise ... social, economic, political, religious or otherwise. **Jesus railed against the way that the business of religion had made religion a business.** Jesus called it as he saw it. All the hustle, all the bustle, all the activity and noise ... all the attention on what people can do, should do and are doing – for the sake of profit and/or for the sake of conscience ... all of it took away from people's ability to worship God alone in spirit and in truth. How could people stand in awe of God's infinite, magnificence and mercy in the midst of the circus, the carnival ... the production ... that religious practice had become? Where, in that system, could a pilgrim find a place to be still and know that God alone is God? Somewhere? Anywhere? Nowhere?

Matthew, Mark and Luke all record the same incident at the temple. They color their accounts a little differently. They take the social justice position and have Jesus calling the merchants, money changers and by implication the religious authorities robbers or thieves. Their concern is for those who are being ripped off by profiteers and the privileged. John alone sees the incredible complexity of the system in which everyone is caught up ... the business of religion ... in which each and every player has a distinct role ... a role in which they have most likely become comfortable. Jesus isn't much interested in their comfort. In fact, he deliberately and willfully makes everyone uncomfortable. And, here's the really scary part ... Jesus Christ through and in the power of the Holy Spirit is still doing it ... still making us uncomfortable by upending the way things are.

Have we become too focused on what we can do for God instead of what God can do through us? Have we become so attached to our systems, doctrines, structures, buildings, worship styles, standing in the community, personal histories in the church and programs that they have become idols ... untouchable? above challenge and change? We'll have to think some more about that. But, I can tell you one thing, if we have Christ Jesus has no problem coming in, creating chaos and turning tables. Whether you see that as terrifying and unacceptable or exciting and welcome has a lot to say about what you truly worship? AMEN