

“Holy Ire”
John 2:13-22
Third Sunday in Lent
March 7, 2021

We like to think of Jesus as peaceful, loving, and grace-giving, but on a particular day in Jerusalem at the Temple, he was anything but calm and gracious. What is the Spirit saying to us in John 2:13-22?

When the Passover Feast, celebrated each spring by the Jews, was about to take place, Jesus traveled up to Jerusalem. He found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.

Jesus put together a whip out of strips of leather and chased them out of the Temple, stampeding the sheep and cattle, upending the tables of the loan sharks, spilling coins left and right. He told the dove merchants, “Get your things out of here! You’ve turned my Father’s house of prayer into a den of robbers!” That’s when his disciples remembered the Scripture, “Zeal for your house consumes me.”

But the Jews were upset. They asked, “What credentials can you present to justify this?” Jesus answered, “Tear down this Temple and in three days I’ll put it back together.”

They were indignant: “It took forty-six years to build this Temple, and you’re going to rebuild it in three days?” But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this. They then put two and two together and believed both what was written in Scripture and what Jesus had said.

Here ends the reading. May God bless these words as we seek to apply them to our lives.

You’re never going to believe what happened before the Passover Feast! We were road-weary and I, for one, was looking for a basin of warm water with which to bathe at the home of one of our patrons.

I was imagining a hot meal of sausages, fresh bread, and fruit wine. Jesus had been pushing us hard. Despite warnings along the way that Herod’s soldiers had it in for him, he had his sights set on Jerusalem and there was no

discussing it, no turning back. Along the way, Jesus stopped to talk to wanderers, lepers, and other street people, blessing and assuring them of the Good News of God's love. He healed many people—blind ones, lame ones, diseased ones, and some who were possessed by evil spirits.

Wherever he went, people knew of him and flocked to him, clamoring for attention, grabbing his cloak, begging him to intervene in their lives or the lives of their loved ones. There were other miracles, too, signs that proved Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

All this was great; all this was laudatory, but it was also very dangerous to be calling attention to us like that. Herod was crazy and evil, no one to be cavalier around. And the Romans had their eyes on us, too, just waiting for an excuse to silence our noise and crush any hint of uprising amongst the Jewish people.

When I tried to tell this to Jesus, he became angry with me, saying, "Get behind me, Satan!" He told us, his disciples, that it was *required* of him that he make these waves. It was his calling, he said, to be arrested, abused, and executed—crucified. He warned us that following him meant we, too, would be taking up our own crosses for the Good News. This was because the Jewish religious authorities did not want to hear about God's grace or God's unconditional love. They had their rules and their laws and that's what they knew. They worshipped a God who for them, demanded obedience to ritual purity, a God that demanded animal sacrifices, Temple taxes, and strict cultural hierarchy.

Jesus was having none of that. When questioned about healing people on the Sabbath, he said that the Sabbath was made for humankind; humankind was not made for the Sabbath. When the religious scholars questioned where he got his knowledge of the scriptures, he told them the Word of God was

meant for all people, not just for them. And when common people were turned away from the holy places, Jesus turned away from the holy places, too, to go be with the people.

His defiance of religious authority came to a head when we arrived in Jerusalem for the Passover. He marched us directly to the Temple where we found a bustling scene of commerce. People were buying and selling animals for sacrifice. Their stalls filled the courtyard and the noise was deafening. We saw that the so-called “holiest” sacrifices were being sold as the most expensive by the Temple authorities—but even modest offerings bore exorbitant prices.

Jesus lost his temper—*big time*. Outraged over the injustice which forced humble petitioners into the web of this corrupt practice, Jesus strode headlong into the middle of the Temple marketplace and started upending tables and throwing merchandise of all kinds to the ground.

When once the noise was deafening, now there was a sudden, eerie shocked silence, all eyes and ears attuned to the disturbance caused by just one obviously deranged man. But this was no possessed person creating the ruckus—it was Jesus! And we were caught up in the thick of it all, our mouths wide open, guilty by association.

Jesus yelled at some of the merchants, “This Temple is no longer a house of prayer!” he exclaimed. Then he wheeled around to the Pharisees and scribes standing off to the side and indicted them, saying, “You’ve turned my Father’s House into a den of robbers!”

While they made no attempt to arrest him in front of the crowd, we could see the Pharisees whispering amongst themselves and the scribes were busy writing down Jesus’ crimes for later use against him. I overheard the Pharisees talk about murdering the “charismatic and contentious interloper”

and I knew they were talking about Jesus, our leader and teacher. Their talk sent chills up my spine; my band of brother and sister disciples and I silently and slowly started to back out of the scene, afraid for our own safety.

“This isn’t the Jesus we have come to know!” I whispered loudly to the others. “What has gotten into him that he has resorted to this Holy Ire, this violence—and in the Lord’s house, no less? Is he *trying* to get arrested? Is he setting us *all* up for disaster?”

If we don’t lie low about our beliefs and keep quiet about our faith, if we don’t hide out with Jesus and keep the scribes and Pharisees off our backs, then Caesar will get wind of the upset we have brought to Jerusalem, and he will tell Pilate, and Pilate will deal with us in the unkindest way. He’ll crucify the lot of us for sure as an example to others to keep our religion--our Good News—to ourselves.

A little less preaching, a little less healing, and a whole lot less confronting—yep, *that’s* what the Holy Spirit is wanting from us, right? How could God want us to stand in harm’s way, you know? We are good people, righteous and upstanding Jews and Gentiles, undeserving of the cross.

This ministry was all good when it started, but as Judas is fond of reminding us, this Jesus-thing now has gotten way out of hand. We used to fly free like birds of prey, high above the fracas, well out of harm’s way, watching, observing, biding our time. But now we have blood on our feathers, for we have struck at the heart of religious law and we will be the hunted ones instead of the hunters. Oh, how I want to fly away from this madness!

And yet, Jesus tells us quietly and assuredly over our supper that the Holy Spirit is guiding us precisely where God *wants us to be*—in the middle of the danger, in the face of injustice. The Holy Spirit, he says, wants to see our

Holy Ire rise up and confront those who would defile God's way, the way of truth, compassion, and mercy.

As he breaks bread for us, he asks of us, "Remember me." As he pours the wine for us, he tells us there is a new covenant with God. This is not the Covenant with Noah that never again would God send the flood waters to consume the earth. This is not the Covenant with Moses that God will always love the Jewish people and give them commandments to live by. No, this is a New Covenant—a Covenant of the heart, a Covenant made with *all people everywhere* sounding forth God's unconditional love for the Creation. Jesus says all people will know God personally and will feel their soul warmed by God's endless, enduring love. Then, as he passes the wine around the table, again he says, "Remember me."

It is a tender moment. It is a quiet reminder of why we have banded together. Jesus says he must die for this message, because the Jewish lawmakers and peacekeepers cannot hear it; they are threatened by him and the Good News. The message of unconditional love is so powerful that the powerful are cowed by it. Their hearts are forged by the same fool's gold that was pounded into the shapes of idols when the people lost heart in the wilderness of Moses' time. And like the idols of long ago, says Jesus, their power and their legacies shall melt away in the Refiner's fire, when as Isaiah prophesied "their swords will be fashioned into ploughshares and they will learn war no more."

Jesus today in the Temple square has shown confidence, boldly walking directly into conflict with those who have the power to silence him. He fortifies our resolve; he gives us encouragement to face our own conflicts, regardless of what we might have to endure as a result.

As fate approaches and we are increasingly afraid, we will remember what he showed us today. We are empowered by knowing that the Holy Spirit does *not* want us to hide away in safe places.

We are not to keep quiet in the face of injustice.

We are not to keep our hands plastered to our sides when others are in need of us to carry them.

We are not to keep our feet planted safely on the ground when God wants us to fly like the proud ones of the sky.

We are loved, fully and wholly by God and in that love, we are weightless, regardless of what jeers and threats the world shouts at us; our wings expand to full length as the sun reflects its majesty and the air carries us forward to our bright and beautiful future in the arms of the angels. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R15vi55cJmk>

May it Be So.

(Follows is John Denver's "The Eagle and the Hawk")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R15vi55cJmk>

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