

CLEANS HOUSE

Isaiah 56: 1-7; Matthew 21:12-15 and Luke 19:47-48

12And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. 13And He said to them, "It is written, 'my house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you are making it a robbers' den."

14And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them. 15But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that He had done, and the children who were shouting in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became indignant. ...

47And He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, 48and they could not find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging on to every word He said.

INTRO:

I think many of us felt a sense of satisfaction when the Justice Department recently announced the findings of the investigation "Operation Varsity Blues." To see a number of people who had been playing a dishonest game get brought into the light of day was, well, to me, it was just a little fun. It was also gratifying to know that for all its other scandals, my alma mater, The Ohio State University, remained untouched by this one. Sorry, all you Trojans and Bruins didn't fare as well.

This scheme allowed moneyed people to skirt around edges and buy privileges like prestigious college admissions that other people's children would have had to work incredibly hard for! Deserving students were denied admission because they were cut out by one of these cheaters. University athletic coaches took bribes to place unqualified players on their teams instead of student athletes who were competing honestly for these slots. In a world in which mixed results are the usual, it feels good to see a clear triumph of justice, when authorities have actually cleaned house.

This is what happened here in the passage we read today. There was a great housecleaning of an unjust system.

When many of us read this story from the life of Jesus, here on the second day of Crucifixion Week, we read anger into the words and actions of our Savior.

I. WAS JESUS REALLY ANGRY?

In John's account, Jesus makes a whip and drives people out, so we assume He was angry.

1. Could He have been angry?
2. Why could He have been angry?
3. Isn't anger wrong?

A. Was Jesus' anger sinful?

1. anger is an emotion. Emotions are neither right nor wrong, they just are.
 - a. Anger – or other feelings, for that matter – turn to sin when we allow it to germinate in our mind and then act it out in our **behavior**, not by having that emotion.

Humor: Merle, Myrtle, and the toothbrush.

- b. In this week's small group lesson, we heard the quote "Anger is the anesthetic of the mind." As fury takes over, you tend to set aside better qualities, like self-control, compassion, and peacemaking.

"Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret."

Ambrose Bierce (1842 – 1914) author & satirist

2. Hebrews says, "He was tempted in all points just as we are, yet without sin." If we believe in the deity of Jesus and His sinless sacrifice for us on the cross for our salvation, then – in my humble opinion at least – we must also believe that this act of cleansing the Temple was not sinful.
3. The Scriptures say, "In your anger do not sin!"
 - a. So, there undoubtedly is an anger that is not sinful, and actions you can do based on anger that are not sinful. But that is most often where our humanity comes into play. When the Apostle Paul says, "In your anger do not sin," he is speaking in the context of Christian unity and good communication with one another. He goes on to say, "Do not let the sun go down on the cause of your anger!" (That's in the NET Bible). "And do not let the devil have a foothold." I don't need to tell you what happens when you go away from somebody mad and you haven't even talked about why you're mad, do I? Everything gets worse, bigger, and everyone's

motives become hateful. You can't stop talking about it – and of course you can't talk about it just to yourself, and pretty soon the fact that they looked at you funny becomes more widely known than the fact that they were your daughter's favorite Sunday School teacher.

To more fully understand what happened in this housecleaning story, and what may have motivated Jesus, we need to know a little bit about where this took place.

II. WHERE JESUS CLEANED HOUSE

A. The Temple: The Court of the Gentiles

Do a temple walkabout (pics of the floor plan and then the NW elevation)

B. A Place Contrived For Commerce

1. In the original plans of the Temple there was no place built for this commerce to take place.

a) The marketplace was brought in table by table and built stall by stall. It was only temporary but it seemed to be going nowhere.

2. This was clearly not God's intention or purpose.

3. "For the sake of enriching the Temple treasury, the High Priest Annas had established a lively business in the sale of animals for sacrifice, and in the exchange of foreign money into Jewish money, in which the Temple tax had to be paid. This business was carried on in the Court of the Gentiles... Operating as a virtual monopoly, and with an assured market, the chief priests profited greatly from the enterprise." (Donald G. Miller, "Layman's Bible Commentary: Luke", p. 137)

(1) Jesus saw a corrupt system abusing and exploiting God's people. (a la Hophni and Phinehas)

(2) Jesus saw exclusion on socioeconomic grounds and dishonest gain.

(3) Jesus saw a zealous love of money winning over a zealous love of God and commitment to His glory.

III. WHY JESUS CLEANED HOUSE

A. Love (Isaiah 56:1-7)

1. This scene took place in the Court of the Gentiles. You could look at the various courts – the Gentiles, the Women, Israel, the Priests, and finally the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies – as varying levels of exclusion. It could be instructive to us, however, to realize that Jesus, the Son of God, didn't rail against these separations of courts as being exclusive. He knew His Father's heart, the heart that was described for us in our reading from the prophet Isaiah: that *all who follow God with hearts of faith have a place in God's courts.*

2. He also knew His mission: He came not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it. He came not to be served but to serve. He came to seek and save the lost. Because of the cross there would be a day when these promises of Isaiah would find exact, deep, and permanent fulfillment: a day when relationship with God would not be based on sacrifices brought by sinful humans, but on the Sacrifice brought by the sinless Son of God. Natural and perceived identity can be superseded by the infinite grace of God activated by faith... excluded no more; all who believe in the Name of the Son of God are reconciled to God and brought near to each other as well by the blood of Christ.

3. But we would still do well to think about the importance of the Court of the Gentiles: it stood as a testament to God's faithfulness: that within the courts of His Temple, there was a place for them. All who sought for God could enter into the court of the Gentiles. All who were curious were welcome there. And this was the space in the Temple for faith-filled Gentiles to be able to get close to the presence of God through prayer, and to hear instruction from His Word. Jesus' concern with it was not that the Court of the Gentiles existed. His concern was what it had become: a place of noisy haggling and arguing instead of quiet prayer and joyous praise. It was no longer a place of invitation; it had become a place of exploitation. LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS – EVEN OTHERS UNLIKE US – got replaced by a calloused love of money and power. His love for others and His devotion to the Father, based on love, was a primary motivating factor in His whole life, including this moment.

B. Righteousness (Jeremiah 7:3-11)

1. Jesus not only quoted Isaiah when He said, "My Father's house will be called a house of prayer for all nations." He also quoted the prophet Jeremiah when he said, "But you have made it into a robbers' den." Here is part of the condemnation to which Jesus was referring:

³Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, “Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. ⁴Do not trust in deceptive words, saying, ‘This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.’ ⁵For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly practice justice between a man and his neighbor, ⁶if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your own ruin, ⁷then I will let you dwell in this place...

⁸“Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. ⁹Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—that you may do all these abominations? ¹¹Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,” declares the Lord.

2. These quotations were surely not lost on the leading priests and members of the ruling class who heard it. As soon as they heard Jesus’ claims, the Scriptures say, the Temple leaders looked for a way to destroy Him.

3. In his *New Daily Study Bible* commentary on Matthew, the late Scottish theologian William Barclay wrote,

“God will never hold guiltless those who make it impossible for others to worship Him. It can still happen. A spirit of bitterness, a spirit of argument, a spirit of strife can get into a church, which makes worship impossible. .. The worship of God and our all-too-human disputes can never go together. Let us remember the wrath of Jesus at those who blocked the approach to God for other people.”

p. 288-289

4. In John’s account of this story, the disciples recalled the words of King David, “Zeal for Your house will consume me.” (Psalm 69:9) Jesus had a righteous desire for the glory of God to shine in all of Temple life and all He could see was this gaming and dishonest scheming.

C. It was His house!!

1. Jesus is God. It was His house! It was His right to clean house! If those who had been entrusted with the leadership of His father’s house would have been committed to doing right, He wouldn’t have had to clean house. But He did. Can you imagine; He knew what the Temple looked like before those temporary tables and stalls had been constructed.

2. One of the scholars I studied this week pointed out that this was a fulfillment of a prophecy in Malachi 3... “The Lord, whom you seek shall suddenly come to His Temple!.... He shall be like a refiner’s fire, and He will purify the sons of Levi.” He not only knew what it was supposed to look like, but He knew what the Court of the Gentiles was supposed to sound like, to feel like; how everyone entering should feel the embrace of the Father’s love and be welcomed into this outer court of the Temple... and He knew that what was going on then was not only not what the Father intended, but it indeed worked against the Father’s purposes.

3. He had every right to clean house because it’s His house. When Mary and Joseph lost Jesus in the crowd of pilgrims returning from Jerusalem and went back to frantically search for Him, they found their son, then 12 years old, teaching the teachers at the Temple. When Mary scolded Him, He said, “Why were you searching for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?” The Father’s house was close to His heart because it was His house!!

4. In 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, we read this from the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”

5. Before I bring my final question, I would like to return to the Scottish theologian Barclay that I mentioned earlier – I guess this is my way of countering St. Patrick’s Day. 😊

“There remains one thing to note. Our passage ends with Jesus healing the blind and the lame in the Temple Court. They were still there: Jesus did not clear everyone out. Only those with guilty consciences fled the eyes of His wrath. Those who needed Him stayed.

Need is never sent away empty by Jesus Christ. Jesus’ anger was never merely negative; it never stopped with the attack on that which was wrong; it always went on to the positive helping of those who were in need. In the truly great man or woman, anger and love go hand in hand. There is anger at those who exploit the simple and bar the seeker; but there is love for those whose need is great. The destructive force of anger must always go hand in hand with the healing power of love.”

Motivated by love and righteousness, Jesus cleaned house because people were being exploited and hindered from worship by a scheme instead of welcomed into life with God and invited to worship Him fully by genuine followers of His. We can be like Him when we are motivated by love and have a genuine thirst for righteousness which drives us to cleanse from our hearts that which stands in the way of us living life with God, as well as any sin in our hearts or our church that stands in the way of us welcoming anyone into life with God, and worshiping Him fully as His genuine followers.

IV. DO OUR HOUSES NEED CLEANING?

You may not have all the issues in your life that I do, but as I read the passage from Jeremiah about doing justice and being faithful and worshiping God alone... there was plenty there. I'm not a thief or a murderer or ... but ...

1. Is love the basis of what I do?
2. Do I do what I do out of a desire for righteousness?
3. Are my own Temple courts – heart, mind, and strength – being used by God for His purposes, or – table by table – have I set up my own games?
4. Can I move through the fiery energy of anger to positively helping others in great need?
5. Here's a question I asked myself this week: Is the Lenten journey a time for me to reorient my life and reset my life's priorities, or is this a short period of giving something up and I can't wait for it to be over so I can go back to life as usual?

I believe God's heart for us is that all of us can in some way manifest the purpose He had for the Court of the Gentiles... that we, enveloped in the love of the Father, should seek to welcome all those around us into that love, that we may be able to say to everyone around us and even around the world: Because of the great love of God, known to us in Jesus Christ our Lord, there is a place for you in Him. Amen.

Interesting thoughts about anger:

<http://www.dailygood.org/story/312/10-life-changing-facts-about-anger/>

(not an endorsement of her or her work, just that this article seemed helpful)