

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church

Lent 3

3/3/2024

Luann Yutzy

Turning the Tables

John 2:13-22

We didn't talk about bodies where I'm from, our own bodies, especially female bodies. It was more like we were supposed to ignore our bodies or even be very cautious of our bodies because if we thought our bodies were beautiful or made in the image of God even; it would surely cause us to sin. So imagine this and you may not have to imagine because you may have lived it too, walking around in our bodies and trying to denounce it and keep it from being a wonderful gift from God.

A lot of energy and very close attention was given to cover the female body in my time of growing up to make sure we pretended it wasn't there and we all knew it was. It was a very confusing upbringing in that way for me; an upbringing that still has an effect even today of shame or just not being totally free.

We also didn't talk about anger growing up. It has taken me a long time to be comfortable around anger that is expressed. I imagine that if I had been in the temple when Jesus was throwing the whip around I would have been in a corner covering my head. I wonder where you would have been in that scene?

Jesus is pretty comfortable with his anger I'd say or we could say it's zeal because zeal is anger made in connection with something important and in this case anger was used ultimately for human connection. Jesus wanted people to have access to the temple and not have the money trading get in the way of all people encountering God.

My experience with anger in the past has been to witness it as almost always anger that points fingers, blaming someone for something. And I think there's another way. Anger can inform us. It can inform us of a huge loss in our life that we did not want. Anger can stir us if we have been apathetic and anger can point us to love, a love that cares about injustices and the people that have been harmed, often the vulnerable, the people that have been forgotten, the people that we say are dispensable and we don't need them. Anger about these things can lead us to a fierce love. A fierce love that holds people accountable like the people disrupting and blocking access to the temple yet for those people too Jesus would give his life. It's a both/and Jesus shows us. We don't use people for our own interests, he says, so stop and I love you so much I'll give my life for you.

So here in the Gospel of John, Jesus has arrived! In John 1:14 it says, "The Word became flesh and lived among us. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us is what it means and in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

Jesus has arrived and Jesus is in the flesh and Jesus is in the building.

We talked about a week ago on Saturday at the transition work Retreat time here that churches are always changing. They are dynamic and they go through life cycles much like human beings and in that time

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there is a season where a church has acquired a building and there is upkeep and management of that building that has to be done and in this passage today the temple tax had to be paid to maintain the temple and it needed to be paid in temple coins not Roman currency with the Roman god on it, so money changers were necessary. A little bit like treasurers today. Treasurers in the church are very helpful and necessary. The money changing happened in the Court of the Gentiles where the Gentile people were kept in the outer courts, not inside and it was becoming a distraction and a hindrance to encountering God.

I don't think it's the main point in this scripture passage but maybe it is a good time to reflect on what the hindrances might be in our buildings that might keep people from entering? Or is accessibility more about people? Our mindset on letting people in. I don't think things like taking Mennonite out of our church names or having a gymnasium or coffee shop inside our church building so more people might come is what Jesus has in mind here. What Jesus has in mind in this temple scene is to really get it that Jesus is here in the flesh and the new Temple is Jesus. This doesn't mean that the old Temple was bad or needed to be torn down. When John is actually writing this account close to the end of the first century the temple actually had been destroyed by the Roman Empire. But when this whole account of Jesus being angry and talking about his body being a temple where he says in verse 19, "Try to destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up," meaning his death and resurrection, this account would still be before the temple had been destroyed. The temple that people were going to for Passover was still there and still under construction.

It can be confusing and a lot of the Gospel of John is that way. There are a lot of symbols like bread, water, light, life, word, shepherd, door and the way. It's almost as if Jesus is portrayed as some kind of code language. It's a little bit like peeling a layer of an onion yet John's gospel portrays the disciples as starting to understand. They are starting to believe and fully believe after the resurrection and they remember back to when Jesus said, "Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up." and they go, "ohhhh."

The last layer of the onion comes off.

It can be easy to miss something that is right in front of us. The Temple had entered the building that day. The Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. Jesus observed the Passover and other Jewish festivals and rituals and frequented temples and synagogues. . He also went far from the temple doors and found the people who had no direct access, the Samaritans, the blind and the sick, the ones who couldn't walk, the lepers, the women, the children. The living Temple went to them. Come to me, you who are weary and

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heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Come to me you who are searching, you who are walking in circles, “I am the way, the truth and the life.”

“Come to me you who are angry and frustrated and ready to give up, I am living water and I am the bread of life.” Come to me, you who are anxious about the future, “Remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

In the first part of John’s gospel, different than the other Gospels, the shadow of the cross is already here, early on because it is important to see the living, breathing, laughing, angry, tearful Jesus in his full humanity and divinity right in front of us so that the temple goes and the leaders would get it that Jesus is the reason they go to temple, so watch him, follow him, live like him, love like him.

Jesus is here for all people. The Jews referred to in this passage are *anyone* who rejects Jesus, it is not referring to the Jewish people group. It was the leaders who questioned his authority and were skeptical and eventually became hostile later on that he was referring to. It could have just as well been you and me guarding our church building from a destructive intruder and demanding to see their i.d..

I have been in a lot of different church buildings. I’ve been in some simple ones, especially in my younger years. As I moved farther west, I’ve been in buildings with stained glass windows and choir lofts, organs with pipes and baby grand pianos. I’ve been in churches that have a 360 view of mountains all around. It was breathtaking. I’ve been in church buildings surrounded by fields, fields with Amish farmers and horses pulling haybines and combines, and churches surrounded by fields of wheat and milo.

I have been in churches that are very quiet and some that are kind of noisy, where none of us knew who would be louder, the baby or me in the middle of a sermon. That baby always seemed to cry at the same point in the sermon every Sunday for a while there. Those South Dakota babies are very smart.

I have been in church buildings that have had traumatic events in their past history and recent history and people know right where they happened in the building. We have had to lead some rituals of healing for the memories.

I have been the first woman pastor in a number of these churches and there have been many open arms and there have been a few that cross their arms and I know what that means.

Yet, in all the churches I have been in I have found people trying to be the church as best they know how. Some do it more naturally than others and it may be because they don’t ignore the bodies they were given,

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the feelings, the emotions they have inside of them and they see each other and the people beyond themselves. They have learned to be the Beloved Community that Jesus invites us to in this passage, to be in tune with what we're going through. To be vulnerable, to cry, to let tears be our prayer when the anger has subsided, to let our anger be named and let it lead us to love. Our bodies are not bad, they are beautiful gifts from God. Christ came in the flesh, in a body and we are made in the image of God.

Jesus was initiating the Beloved Community of God, a walking Temple we carry with us wherever we go, to help others encounter God in how we relate to them and how they see God in us. We are the followers of the Way, a totally new radical way of being in the world and seeing the world through the eyes of Christ that really has little to do with church membership or how we order our worship. It has everything to do with being a walking presence of God in the world and in our church, watching for injustice, showing mercy, loving fiercely, when needed, and holding both/and together- accountability and I'm not giving up on you at the same time.

An example of this that I heard recently was the author Anne Lamott posted something on social media that crossed a boundary or wasn't kind and her son called her out on it on social media and said something like, "Mom, I love you and what you posted was very wrong and hurtful and you need to take responsibility for the harm you did and apologize and... I will always be here for you, her son said." That's what I mean when I talk about fierce love and holding both/and. It takes vulnerability to do that.

I have a couple spiritual practices for you this week. I'd like to invite you to pay attention to your body this week, the body that God has given you. We all have bodies. Listen to your body. What is your body telling you? Are you tired? Do you hear yourself sigh? Can you love your body? Can you say in the mirror the words of Psalm 18:19, "Know that God delights in you. He brought me out into a broad place; he delivered me, because he delighted in me."

Pay attention to your bodies with love this week. If we can love our own bodies, we will have a hard time ignoring when other bodies around us (people around us) are exploited or harmed. We will be more likely to be stirred to do something about it.

The second spiritual practice is to notice zeal in you and around you. What is something really important to you? Can you tell when you are listening to something or you are speaking about something that your heart quickens, your voice tremors and maybe you get more animated? What are you passionate about? It's not too late.

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Notice this week when people's eyes light up when they talk about something. What contexts, what outlets do you have to live out your zeal?

And may we remember it is a privilege to have a house of worship here, to gather together and bring all we carry here together before God and then to not leave it here but leave with our bodies and all that they hold and be the walking temple, the Beloved Community that goes everywhere bringing the good news of Jesus as we go about our everyday lives. Worship doesn't stay in here. We take it with us.

It's a new day!

The tables have turned.

The Word has come in flesh and bones and has tabernacled among us.

Amen.