



Calvary Presbyterian Church
Sunday, March 3, 2024

Beloved Dust: Turning Tables

Rev. Eyde Mabanglo

SCRIPTURE READING

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts (John 2:13-22, NIV)

¹³When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"

¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."

²⁰They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

MESSAGE

This last week, our family met up in the bay area - an area called Hilltop, between San Pablo and El Sobrante - where my mother-in-law raised eight boys in a three-bedroom double-wide. I found myself needing to jump back into my mommy role as I knew the aunts and uncles would be tied up with hosting the viewing at the cemetery while my children, now adults, were flying in within an hour of the viewing start time.

My daughter bought her ticket to land in SFO instead of OAK, a matter of cost and logistics no doubt. Her flight would be over six hours from Boston. So, I arranged to fly in 90 minutes before, so that she wouldn't be alone in the strangeness of the city. Then, we found a flight for my son from Phoenix that put him at the same airport between these two flights. I landed, grabbed my suitcase, rented the car, found my sunglasses, and plugged in my phone. My son joined me moments later, and we drove around the airport to pick up his sister.

I went into auto pilot. I made sure there were snacks and something to drink. It was like I was picking them up from their elementary school as I did so many times twenty years ago. I was nervous. Their hearts were heavy. They were tired. Surely, they were hungry. Would they fight over who sat in the front seat?! I told my son he might have to sit in the back. He simply replied: why?

Why? Good question. When they were children, we developed a rule that on even days, Eddie sat in the front. On odd days, Jessica sat in the front. It was February 26. It's an even day. We're good. I thought to myself. Why am I doing this? My children are 29 and 26. They aren't going to fight over who sits in the front seat on the way to their grandmother's funeral. Are they?

And they didn't. They were so good. And I told them that I would give them stickers.

I tell this story because I think it illustrates, albeit in a small way, how women often are the judges of equity, peace, harmony, and unity...and not just in our families, but in our communities...in ancient times, men

were hunting for food, gathering provisions, building their homes, protecting their families to ensure the lifeblood of their heritage would not only survive but thrive. They often were not home. Naturally, day to day life, logistics, and care would fall on the women of the community. This wasn't just washing and cleaning as Maytag commercials of the 1960's would have you assume, but it also involved a building and protecting of families...protecting them from unfairness, exploitation, injustice, and oppression. It was the women who often felt the pulse of community life, knew the need to consider the sides of each party, needed to consider the weight of evidence and fact, and when needed issue a settlement or a punishment that would preserve the dignity of all involved.

Isn't it curious that I felt that was my job when I decided to fly into SFO, pick up my adult children, and make sure they had everything they needed (including certain regulations about who sat in the front seat on certain days) in order to love them, care for their hearts, and celebrate within my own heart their kind generation...as they prepared to say goodbye to another. As they prepare to say goodbye to a woman who raised eight boys, often while her husband was deployed serving his country.

For thousands of years and in almost every corner of this vast world, there is a symbol, a statue, a metaphor for justice...she is often beautiful, strong, tall - she has a sword in one hand that represents her strength and sometimes her swiftness, she holds a scale/a balance in the other that represents the imperative to hear, consider, and weigh all things as she considers how to keep the scales of justice balanced, and she often has a blindfold that represents how she must remain impartial to social preconceptions, political prejudices, racial/ethnic or socio-economic bias as she determines inequities and imparts justice to keep her scales balanced. You have seen her. Her name is Lady Justice.

This same justice is at the heart of our God. We must become students of this justice/the very righteousness of God. And this is God of righteousness who was intent on becoming human to show us the way of justice.

And I would argue that as we reflect upon the Scriptures this morning and look for the heart of God, we will find God's righteousness and justice thundering through this story. Jesus brings his full self into the temple that day. His divine self. His human self. He is more aware than most that the temple is where his beloved children (now siblings) come to experience the intersection of heaven and earth. The people of God come to worship. They come to remember God's faithfulness, to sing ancient songs, to pray with an intimacy that touches their deepest heartache.

But Jesus finds injustice and exploitation and cheating in his father's house, this temple. With the same intensity as a mother caring for her children, with the same intent and compassion as a mother helping her family maintain a sense of communal equilibrium, with the same rage a mother feels when one child hurts another, Jesus uses his human hands to fashion a cord to stop everything.

To stop it.

To
Stop
It

Oh Calvary...there are so many things that need to stop.

I stand here as a preacher...as a pastor...as a woman...as a mother...they just need to stop.

So, today. Our passage shows us - not a new side to Jesus - but a side to Jesus that we don't always talk about. The part of our loving, benevolent Lord and Savior that calls out injustice...and actually does something about it.

Friends, we are walking in the steps of the rabbi this Lenten Season. We are trying to follow our Lord Jesus so closely that we are covered in the dust of our rabbi. Covered with his teachings, his ways, walking his path, living the Christian life of love and mercy and justice, walking humbly with our God. And this is what God requires of us...isn't it.

And we as a church, we are called to embody Christ in this place, but also in the marketplace, in the community, in the halls of justice, in the streets, and in the world. And in order to embody Christ, let us walk so closely behind him that we watch his every step, every move that he makes with this human body with this divine heart...and follow.

As we follow, we see him sit with Mary, we see kneel down on human knees and draw in the dust with human fingers to tell a woman that she is not condemned, he touches a man's eyes and the man sees again, he sleeps in a boat, he prays in a garden, he embraces a friend who has betrayal in his heart, he knelt again with a pitcher of water in his hand and a towel around his waist, and he washes the feet of his beloved friends, he eats and drinks...just as we do...at the table, he eats and drinks with us still. And he braided cords together with his fingers to stop the injustice carried out in his father's house.

He spoke of a temple that he would rebuild. A temple that was his body. A temple where men and women, you, and I, find the intersection of heaven and earth. Christ's body is where we find our true place of worship, Christ's body is where we find our true community, Christ's body is where we find solace and comfort and peace and all truth, Christ's body is where our deepest heartache is met with inconceivable joy. It is why we are here today, to be Christ's body.

And...Christ's body also endured torture, crucifixion, and death. Christ's body also was raised in three days...Christ's body is now alive in you and in me, in this beloved community, in our hearts, on this plateau, and in the world.

As we walk in the dust of the rabbi, let us kneel, rest, listen, heal, call out justice, call in our siblings, die to self and be made new every day...let us embody the Body of Christ in all ways.

May it be so.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'eyl' followed by a long, sweeping flourish.

