

March 4, 2018
Sermon for Third Sunday in Lent
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
John 2:13-22 (23-25)

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

John 2:13–22 (ESV)

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

John 2:23–25 (ESV)

²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Amen.

“*That’s the bad guy!*” “No, *he’s* not the bad guy! She did it! *She’s* the bad one!”

When Cyndi and I watch NCIS or Sherlock Holmes type movies we always try to figure it out ahead of time. Who is the bad guy and how would we try to stop them?

There always seem to be bad guys and quite often they are working in important places. They sometimes use their positions in the government as a way to make sure they could elude Gibbs and get away with their bad guy things.

While Cyndi and I might have trouble figuring out who the bad guys are in a TV program, in the Gospel before us this morning, we see that Jesus would have *no* problem doing that—*at all!*

As we heard, Jesus “*knew all people*” and “*needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.*” (vv 24, 25).

Of course, these words of St. John refer to something far more important than a television program. John’s words have a true life and death aspect to them—unlike the make believe situations with which the characters on TV are working to against:

For Jesus, knowing all people, leads to our cleansing.

Let’s consider all this for the next few minutes. Today’s Text is in the early stages of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It’s time for the annual Passover celebration, so as a faithful Jew, Jesus goes to Jerusalem as required.

But, when He went to the temple, He was disgusted by what He found. The temple courtyard had been turned into a marketplace!

Merchants and salesmen had set up shops selling pigeons, oxen, and sheep to the faithful who had come to Jerusalem from far-off lands.

Money-changers were also there, changing foreign currency into local money, again, so the faithful could pay the temple tax of one-half shekel.

To have these things available to the foreign worshipers *wasn't* bad, because worship of the Lord demanded the people bring sacrifices in proportion to their wealth. And it was totally impractical—*if not impossible*—for someone who had come a long distance to bring his own sacrificial animal.

There needed to be *some* way for those things to be acquired in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, God had even given instructions for this kind of arrangement.

The problem was that the sellers, some of whom weren't always the most honest or ethical, had set up shop right in the temple itself, in what is known as the court of the Gentiles. The people had made the house of God into a stinking spectacle.

Think of it! The worshipers, as they passed through the courtyard on their way into the temple, were probably more focused dodging manure and on bargaining over the cost of the animals or bickering about the exchange rate for their foreign money than they were on singing entrance psalms and preparing their hearts for worship of the Lord Most High! What a disgrace!

There's no problem here recognizing how guilty everyone involved in all this trading was. Even though this is how it has always been done, that doesn't make it right!

As Jesus came into the temple, the "bad guys" were right out in the open for all to see. And none of them were worried about this supposed Son of God.

Jesus, incorrectly thought by some to be weak and soft shows Himself to be a man of strength and action. He personally—*and by Himself*—took on the whole lot of them. He took cords and, using them as a whip, drove the animals and merchants out of the temple, thus fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would have "zeal" for the house of God (Ps 69:9).

Again, for those who think of Jesus as a "easy target," you have to think again. Not only did He take them all on, but also, according to the account before us, *not one* of the merchants even *dared* to stand up to Him!

Whenever I read this account, my mind goes to the old Rawhide TV theme that starts with the whip sound. "Keep movin', movin', movin' Though they're disapprovin' Keep them **merchants** movin', rawhide

We hear this story, and we say, "Good! Good for you, Jesus! You saw that those insiders from the temple hierarchy were 'bad guys,' and you busted them, kicked 'em out in quick order!"

There's no doubt this smelly spectacle of manure, sweaty people and droves of animals being sold right within the house of the Lord was bad, but Jesus was seeing even more.

He looked into people's hearts.

He saw through their unfaithfulness, their hiding behind God's instructions in order to make a quick buck. As bad as the scene and the smell *had* to be, the *spiritual* stench of the place—lust for money at God's expense—*was worse!*

And *how* could Jesus know that?

John tells us: "because he *knew* all people" (v 24). Jesus *knew* their hearts and saw them for what they were—sinners through and through, more interested in making a few shekels than in honoring the Lord's house.

But before you join me, self-righteously pointing out the "bad guys," consider again the words before us: "[Jesus] *knew all people . . . for he himself knew what was in man.*" The Lord Jesus knows *all* and sees *all*.

And, if He knows the hearts of the money-changers and animal purveyors, he knows *your* heart as well!

Jesus sees *your real* attitude toward those Ten Commandments we heard in our Old Testament reading a bit ago!

Although you might not be caught bowing down to a "carved image," He sees your attitude toward a bunch of *other* things you allow to be foremost in your life—such as your work, your money, your family, your vacation, *you* fill in the blank! He sees your attitude toward sins of the flesh, toward other people's property, toward speaking well of your neighbor.

Oh, yes, He sees it *all!* Admit it: you—just like the temple merchants—you are one of the "bad guys" rightly deserving to have Jesus take a whip and drive you out of his presence *forever!*

One Biblical commentator described why Jesus had to rid the temple of those “bad guys.” He writes: “The uncleanness in the temple portrayed the corruption of the people and was an image of the impurity in their hearts. The conditions existing in the temple are therefore a testimony against the people. [Jesus’] blows [with the whip] struck at their hearts. And the cleansing is a picture of what must occur with the people to make it a holy nation acceptable to God. And what is more, this must be made to apply to the individual. The house of the heart must be cleansed if it is to be the temple of God” (Ylvisaker, 138–39).

Dear people of God, we, too, have a “spiritual stench,” and it’s *far* worse than the largest holding pen of cattle or goats in a closed-up barn on a hot, humid summer day!

During this holy season of Lent, our Lord calls us to recognize our absolute need for a cleansing of our hearts laden with sin.

He calls us to allow His right and just Law to show us our sins as if we were looking in a mirror, and then in repentance and faith to receive Him as he reaches out to us—to *you*—with His love and mercy.

He urgently desires to cleanse “the house of [your] heart,” to wash it pure with the only cleaning agent that will get the “stench” out—His holy, precious blood shed for you and the whole world!

This He did on the cross of Calvary. He cleansed the temple. “Zeal” for His Father’s house *drove* Him to cleanse the temple that fateful day, and “zeal” for you—zeal motivated by His eternal love—*drove* Him to the cross to cleanse you, so that you could be a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19)

Your body and soul washed clean and pure, thereby making you to be a righteous one of His *forever!*

You see, you're no longer a "bad guy" in God's estimation. No! Through faith given to you in the washing of renewal in your baptismal waters, you're now one of His very own, a forgiven child of His. God sees you and He sees His Son in you.

Rather than chasing you out of His eternal presence with a whip, He eagerly walks toward you, always seeking to embrace you, inviting you to dine at His table, *regularly* here on earth and *eternally* with Him in heaven!

Dearly beloved of God, continue to walk with the Lord Christ in repentance and faith. In Christ, your heart to be—*and remain*—cleansed, that it will *forever* be a temple of God!

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

Jesus Knowing All People Leads to Our Cleansing

John 2:13-22

- I. As Jesus came into the temple, the bad guys were right out in the open for all to see.
- II. Jesus knows the hearts of *all* people.
- III. Jesus cleansed not only the temple but also our sinful hearts.