

11 March 2012

Reading: John 2:12-25 (NT pages 1065)

Background to the reading

The Gospels describe the clearance of the temple as the final public appearance of Jesus while John describes it as the first public act of Jesus in Jerusalem.

Our reading starts with Jesus and his close-knit family in Capernaum where they stayed for a few days. Capernaum was a flourishing city in Galilee situated on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee or Lake of Gennesaret, near the place where the Jordan flows into the lake.

But because it was time to celebrate the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the NT τὸ πάσχα denotes either the (seven-day) Jewish feast of the Passover or Only rarely in the narrower sense meaning the actual Passover meal (held on the night of the 15th Nisan). or As in the OT it may be used for the Passover lamb slain at mid-day on the 14th Nisan in the forecourt of the temple at Jerusalem and then eaten after sundown. The Jewish Passover was celebrated to commemorate the deliverance out of Egypt and the Lord's passing over the houses of the Israelites when the first born of all the Egyptians were destroyed. They had to kill a lamb and use the blood on their doorposts in order for the Lord to know that they

were his people. The OT distinguishes between the Passover, which was celebrated on the night of the 14th–15th Nisan, and the feast of unleavened bread, held from the 15th to the 21st Nisan. However in later Judaism the two were popularly combined and “Passover” was generally used for both and this is the predominant usage in the NT. The feast was one of the three pilgrimages and as such was a high point of the year and it had to be celebrated in Jerusalem.

So Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem and the temple to worship and sacrifice to God. And it was here where Jesus finds himself.

In the NT, “temple” always refers to the temple that was rebuilt by Herod the Great. The temple consisted of four courts namely:

The COURT OF THE PRIESTS, which was the inner court, where only the Priests could go. The COURT OF THE JEWS, where only natural-born Jews were allowed. It was this court where they handed over their sacrifices to the Priests. The COURT OF WOMEN, where the women were allowed, and could go in no further. The COURT OF THE GENTILES was outside, and it was the large open area that had turned into a marketplace. It contained the porches where the people gathered, money was exchanged, and the animals and items pertaining to the sacrifices were bought and sold. It is sometimes

referred to as the court of the Gentiles. The whole temple, therefore, consisted strictly of two parts: the physical structure or inner temple and the courts leading into it.

The setting of this scene is the Court of the Gentiles within the temple grounds, which had come to resemble a market rather than a place of worship. The scene can be contrasted directly with the old testament prophetic view of the role of the temple in the worship of God. The temple court of the Gentiles apparently had been turned over to the sale of animals and birds used in sacrifice. The pigeons or doves, was the sin offering of the poor. It is also mentioned in the temple cleansing in Mark and Matthew, but the presence of the more expensive animals is noted only here. The usual sin offering was a lamb or goat. Oxen are mentioned specifically in connection with the burnt offerings.

But Jesus could not stand the fact that the temple was now a market place full of money changers and shopkeepers. Each Israelite who was part of the annual poll was expected to provide a half-shekel tax/offering to the temple. Because many Jews came from outside Israel instead of bringing offerings of animals or birds could bring money and purchase them from the temple staff, a practice that

developed out of the alternative pattern provided in Deut 14:25. The payments of these items, however, could not be made in foreign currencies like Roman denarii, which contained pagan symbols and the images of emperors. Therefore the money had to be exchanged for appropriate temple currency. The result was that the temple also became a major money exchange or bank.

When Jesus said “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!” the disciples remembered Ps 69:9 which actually speaks of the same zeal and passion Jesus had for worshipping in the presence of God.

Many groups in Judaism expected a new or transformed temple. But the old temple was one of the most magnificent buildings in antiquity, the symbol to which the rest of Judaism looked. To most Jews, and especially to the aristocracy who controlled Jerusalem’s temple, Jesus’ words here would sound blasphemous. Herod the Great began work on the temple in 20–19 b.c., and work continued until a.d. 64; its forty-sixth year mentioned here places Jesus’ words in approximately a.d. 27. Although it was only completed in 64 the Romans totally destroyed it in 70 AD!

But Jesus was not referring to the temple in Jerusalem but to what will happen to his body in future. His body will be destroyed but God will transform him and raise him from the dead and He will ascend to heaven to be with God forever and ever. After Jesus was resurrected, the disciples remembered what Jesus had said.

In the last verses John tried to tell his readers that Jesus was God because only God was thought to know the hearts of all people like Jesus says in the last two verses.

So what is the meaning of this text? John was trying to emphasize the mission of Jesus namely to represent His Father on earth, to reveal the love of God and to save the sins of humankind. By representing God, Jesus could not agree with the fact that the people changed the Holiness of God's presence at the temple to a market place. And Jesus also used the temple to refer to what will happen to his own body just like the Passover lamb that would be slain.

Youth church contemporary lesson

“Jesus speaks of his body as God’s temple,
that will be broken to be restored to wholeness.”

Somewhere else in the New Testament the apostle Paul would say:

“ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who
is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own;
²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. “

So yes our bodies are suppose to reflect the glory, mercy and love of
God.

Now my question is to you as teenagers? Have you ever thought of
your body as a witness to the glory and mercy of God? How do you
treat your body?

I am sure you that we often find fault with our bodies. We tend to
think that we are either too fat or too skinny. And to make matters
worse – we either over eat to compensate with all the brokenness
that we have to carry or not to eat at all and then eventually die of
hunger. Or we make fun at other teenagers – in most cases how they
look, and what they wear. Do you think that is something that Jesus
would do? No our bodies must reflect the fact that we have received
the mercy of God. We must respect our bodies by trying to eat in a
balanced way and by not making jokes at the expense of others!

And we need to be careful how we as a “body” speak and talk to others. We cannot expect others to believe that we are children of God but we swear more than anyone else and gossip about everyone in a non loving way. We cannot expect others to believe in God’s mercy when we make unpleasant remarks on Facebook or twitter.

May we always remind each other that our bodies are a witness to God’s forgiveness through Jesus Christ!

Amen

Sermon

The text verse is verses 24 & 25: ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. ²⁵ He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.

So what is the message for us living in the 21st century?

I think the message is hidden in the last two verses of our reading. There is a big difference between God and man, between the temporal and the permanent. Our focus on earth must not be on the temporal but on the permanent things. We must trust in God and not in the temporal things. And if we think about it long enough we will have to admit that it is the temporal; things that often makes us

unhappy and causes a lot of conflict.

Let us take the modern day church for example. It is obvious that no one who attends the assembly every year argue or disagree about God's love but when it comes to human matters such as church property, money, sexuality, and morality there is fierce debate and a lot of disagreement. And the best part is – all the people who disagree with one another uses the Bible to defend their positions. The fact of the matter is that the Bible's intention was not to be involved in human matters but that it was written to testify the Almighty presence of God in human lives. The Bible is about God and His kingdom just like Jesus who wanted to tell the people of his time that the Temple is about the presence of God where He is worshipped. It is not about human offerings and human enterprises.

And I think it must be our focus too in everything we do. If we want to be church of Jesus Christ, we do not need the temporal things. We need God's help and in order to have his guidance we must pray and worship Him. If we want to be His church on this earth He must be our only focus. If we come to buildings to find God, we will be surprised every time because God doesnae reside within the walls of buildings. God is everywhere – even in the places that we would not associate Him with...

Because any place can become His temple when we kneel in obedience to Him, and when we worship Him as the ONE and ONLY God, the maker of heaven and earth. And yes like I said in the contemporary lesson, even our bodies can become the temple of God when we act in obedience to His will.

Last year I was asked to conduct the renewal of vows of a couple who celebrated their golden anniversary in a local Pub. I thought at first – what? In a PUB? But after thinking about it, I thought well God is everywhere. If I read from His word and everyone who attends the ceremony is worshipping Him, He will be there through His Holy spirit like He promised in His word - even if it is a PUB. So when I started putting on my robes, I could see a lot of people staring as if they have never seen a minister in his robes in a PUB before. And then after asking the people very nicely to restrain themselves from drinking alcohol during the service in respect for God, I just continued the worship service as if we were all sitting in the temple in Jerusalem, by way of saying. And when I finished, a lot of other non guests came up to me and thanked me for the service. It was then that I realised that the Church of Christ can happen everywhere, when God's word is preached, and where His love and mercy is shown to all people!

I drove away with a lump in my throat because I remembered how

many times I was wrong by restricting the presence of God to a particular place like a church building. It changed my way of thinking completely. God unlike human beings do not judge or exclude. He doesnae have favourite dwellings. He is indeed the Almighty God who can break through any heart, any place on this earth to show His love.

So let us focus on the things that really matters - the things that can make us happy and give us peace namely to seek God's presence and peace. And let's not worry to much about the temporal things that often divides us.

Amen