



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

March 15, 2009

3 lent 2009

This morning's gospel is one of the few stories that we find in all four gospels. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke the temple is cleansed after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem days before his crucifixion. Yet in John it is at the beginning of the gospel and according to the time line of John it was 3 years before the crucifixion of Jesus.

Yet the story is in all gospels and whatever theological significance each writer wanted to give to it when we put the story together we come up with one story that is very important in our lives as followers of the way of Jesus

The story according to all 4 gospels;

It was the time of Passover so all Jews were making pilgrimage to Jerusalem to go to the temple and offer their sacrifice at the altar. Jesus as his custom was went to the temple. He finds people exchanging money and buying and selling animals for sacrifice. In a rage of anger he makes a whip of cords and drives out the money changers and overturns the tables. He said my house shall be called a house of prayer but you have made it into a den of thieves. Then the blind, the lame and the sick come to Jesus and he heals them. The children praise him and are rebuked by the religious leaders. Jesus tells them out of mouths of babes and suckling's comes perfect praise.

So what happened? What was the reason for the story?

When Jesus arrives at the temple he does not expect what he found.

What he finds is the temple being used as a place of huge profit. The only money that could be used

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to buy animals for sacrifice was temple money. You see you were not allowed to bring your own animal for sacrifice. It was not BYOB- bring your own bird. You were only allowed to buy animals at the temple, with temple money, and the prices of the animals were extremely high. Therefore your Denarii and shekel had to be exchanged for temple money. The exchange rate of the money changers was ridiculously low. Exchange rate low, prices incredibly high. Therefore for all those people who made the pilgrimage to the Temple at Passover, it had been turned into a time of hardship and guilt and huge profit.

When Jesus saw this, it made him furious. His wrath filled the air as he went on a rampage through the temple. He stopped the trading and threw out the traders and freed the animals.

Jesus cleansed the temple.

So what does this story mean for us?

In this story I believe there is a formula that needs to be learned by individuals and communities of faith.

When Jesus came to the temple the first thing that he did was to cleanse it. To purify it of those people and activities that tainted it. To get rid of the ungodly activities. To purge that which was not of God.

When Jesus comes into the life of a person the first thing he does is to purify it. To purge it of that which is not of God. To ask us to get rid of the ungodly activities that we engage in. Our words and actions that are not reflective of the love of god.

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When people acknowledge their sins to Jesus he cleanses them and the person becomes a new creation. When the purification has taken place there is then a conscious movement to prayer.

When Jesus cleansed the temple he said my house shall be a house of prayer. When Christ comes into a person's life or into a community of faith after the cleansing, there is always a movement to prayer.

Prayer is the essence of our relationship with God. Whether it be adoration, confession, intercession, or thanksgiving our prayer deepens and nourishes and builds our relationship with God.

When the purifying has taken place, when prayer becomes an integral part of our life you know what happens? It becomes attractive. Your life, your church, becomes attractive. Not in the sense of the worlds understanding of attractiveness, but in the godly sense of attractiveness.

Your life becomes a life that has an inner peace. Calmness. A depth of spirituality.

You know people who are like that and you also know churches like that and they are attractive. And those churches and those people attract other people.

In Matthew it tells us that once cleansing had taken place once prayer had been entered into the lame and the sick came to Jesus.

People are attracted by a spirit of forgiveness, a spirit of love, a spirit of acceptance, and a spirit of care. A spirit of openness that is willing to change the way things are done so that the love of god may be shown more clearly to all of gods children.

Because when people become surrounded by the spirit of a Christian community then healing begins

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to take place.

That which is broken begins to be mended.

That which is wounded begins to be healed. That which we thought was unforgivable is forgiven.

Those who thought themselves unlovable find they are loved.

People come.

And that brings us to the final phase in all of this cycle- praise.

There is no other way to say thanks to God except in our praise of him.

If we are willing for God to come into our lives God comes with a simple formula that Jesus showed at the cleansing of the temple. God purifies us. Purification moves us to prayer. As people and community of prayer we become spiritually attractive. We attract other people and we all are moved to praise.

To be with somebody who strives to be christlike, to be in a community of faith that strives to be christlike, you know that they have followed the recipe given to us by god through Jesus so that all people may be led to praise

amen

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