

March 3, 2024

Pr. Steve

Texts: Jeremiah 7: 10-15; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25; John 2: 13-22

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Good to see you.

During the week that we were in Missoula, I walked our grandchildren to school every day. (Now Bev got up and woke them up and washed and dressed them, and prepared lunches, and had breakfast, and made coffee—but I walked them to school every day.) Now on the fourth day, Charlotte, our four-year-old granddaughter, asked me as we were about to head out the door, "Grandpa, how come you always take us to school?" and I said, "Because I'm good at it." And she said, "No, you're not!" She saw right through me. I didn't stand a chance.

I love this text for today [John 2: 13-22], this Cleansing of the Temple. Whoo! Here's the strange thing—in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, it's the last thing that happens before Jesus is arrested. It's the last straw, and the authorities say, *'It's time to kill him.'* In John's gospel, it's at the very beginning. What? In John's gospel, Jesus is overturning the Temple in everything that he does. It's the theme of John's gospel. He is fulfilling, completing, the prophets' mission over the centuries. But let's be crystal clear—this is not anti-Judaism—it is anti-authoritarianism.

And why does he do it? 'This is God's House of Prayer for all People—and you turn it into a den of thieves, a robbers' cave, religious racketeering. Not just those on the ground, the money changers, but the whole entire system was established to make money, to presume to have religious power and authority. It says that religion is only about externals, rituals formalisms, priesthoods. And Jesus tears it apart.

Mercy is what God desires—not sacrifice, not loyalty, not obligation—mercy from every one of us, because God is and can only be known as merciful love. Nothing else communicates God—rules, law, obligations—nothing. Only when we show mercy is God made real.

So for Jesus, it's all about the inner connection, the inner integrity, the inner heart, the inner relationship, the inner caring for life in all of its broken forms, and providing mercy. That's the only time people know and meet God, the only time.

Now the Temple is also understood by folks in those days as a navel of the universe. (Have you heard this phrase before?) Okay, a navel of the universe—many cultures and religions have this around the world—the navel is where there seems to be a very thin separation from that intimacy with God and the Holy One and the Mystery. Canyon De Chelly in the Southwest is a navel—[also] Varanasi, India; Delphi, Greece—and the Temple in Jerusalem.

And so, when Jesus is cleansing the Temple, it is a very clear communication to the people of his time that he is claiming *'the entire universe is sanctified by God'*.

What are you doing here? How are you living in ways to manifest that glorious sanctification of all life? Everything in the cosmos is sacred. The Earth is sacred. We are here to restore, and reverence, and care for, and be responsible for this sacred Earth.

The economy is sacred. (How's that for a bad joke?!) It is here to provide sustenance for the peoples of the earth, the well-being of the earth, and all that is—to nurture the common good, provide hope, and opportunity for people. That's why the economy exists.

Education is sacred. Every child, a gift from God. We are here to draw out the spirit of each person. And what do we have? A manufacturing institution of test-taking. What an insult to our children! And they know it. (Natalie and Noah know it—the endless test taking is an insult to their lives.) Education is sacred, every dimension of life sacred, a gift of creation meant to be a blessing for each and all of us.

So, where is the Temple now?

It's us. It's a 'living temple'—in who we are, and how we live, and the values that we care about, the ways in which we relate to other people, and honor the gifts of our lives and others—it's us.

And with my granddaughter Charlotte, the congregation says, "No, we're not. You can't ask that of us. That's way too important, isn't it? You know how messed up we are. We're wounded people. We're filled with contradictions. We have delusions. We don't know what we're doing here. It can't possibly be us.'

To which God says, *‘You are my beloved sons and daughters, here to create the Beloved Community—not for the sake of the Church, but for the sake of the world.’*

Now Lent is the perfect season to begin cleansing the temple, (right?), to empty us out of all that is nonsense and unnecessary, to be put back in touch, to be attuned and aware of what is our calling. And, friends, it comes through conversation, but also the discernment of each one of our hearts. It's personal, and vast, and essential, and creative—an open-ended *‘What shall we become together in this time and place?’*

And, the Temple is Christ, forever centered in that infinite love, and wisdom, and mercy of God. That divine revelation is always on the move, always dancing—to create within us that embodied compassion, and joy, and wisdom for our sake and the sake of the world. Even in death he goes on trusting in the mercy of God and invites us to do so now.

The ancient Temple was doomed. Jesus talked about it. 40 years after his crucifixion, it was torn down by the Romans and never rebuilt. We are the replacement.

(Put your hand on your heart and say, *‘I am the Temple now. I am the Temple, and the world needs me, and the world needs us. We are the Temple of God.’*) And he does so by renewing within us that inner connection, and peace, and integrity, and relationship, and joy—so that we can worship in Spirit and Truth, not just on Sundays—the whole of our lives acts of worship in Spirit and Truth.

We'd like to say, *‘No, we're not!’*

Yes, we are. Yes, we are. Yes, we are. Yes, we are.  
Thanks be to God.

Amen.