

St. John's Lutheran Church
The Third Sunday in Lent
Marsh 07, 2021
"Turning the Tables"

In the name of our risen Lord and Savior, ✠ Jesus Christ. Amen.

John 2:13-22 Theme: "Zeal for The House of God!"

Have you ever watched a movie where things aren't what they appear to be; the bad guys are good; the good guys are bad, and the crime never really happened. In these types of movies, you very often cheer for things you find out later you shouldn't have been cheering for. Today's message on the Gospel is like one of those movies. The tables get turned in two ways.

Throughout the years Jews from all over the Roman Empire came to Jerusalem at the Passover and other high festivals to pay their annual Temple tax with the sacred coin, the sanctuary shekel. To do so, they needed to exchange their foreign money for the sacred money of the Temple. And so, bankers, or money changers, established flourishing businesses within the Temple charging excessive rates to do so.

And since it was necessary for God's people to have sacrificial animals for offerings in the Temple those traveling great distances brought money to buy doves, lambs, or oxen within the holy city. This also caused notorious abuses. Over time merchants moved closer and closer to the Temple until they were eventually selling their animals inside the Temple. And by fixing and controlling prices monopolies were created. The money changers Jesus drove from the Temple were occupying the Temple's sacred space with the things of the world.

But what could be done? Who would be bold enough to clean-up the mess caused by this deep-rooted scandal? The prophet Malachi prophesied what would take place. **"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple . . . and He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."**

This prophecy spoke of Jesus. Jesus went into the most holy city on earth, Jerusalem. Into the most holy building in Jerusalem, the Temple. During the most holy season of the year, Passover. And He turned over the tables of those selling the items needed for Passover.

Nobody in Jerusalem thought the tables needed turning. Nobody thought that the men selling cattle, sheep, and doves should be driven out of the temple. Where else could people get animals guaranteed acceptable by the priests for sacrificing? Where else could they exchange their money?

The buying, selling, and money changing was necessary. The Temple tax collected at Passover had to be paid in Jewish coin. Roman coins weren't acceptable because they had pagan images stamped on them.

Everyone was fine with the Temple being a "one stop shopping center," except Jesus. When Jesus found those who were selling oxen, sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting in the Temple He began overturning tables. Jesus told them, **"Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."** **"And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen."**

The Temple proper was sacred space. It was intended to reflect God's Divine presence. God had met with His people in the Temple at the mercy seat atop the Ark of the Covenant in "the holy of holies." From that space would flow the blood of countless sacrifices, each one pointing the Israelites to the final once for all sacrifice, the Lamb that God Himself would provide. The One who would be wounded for your transgressions and pierced for your iniquities. The One who would by His stripes heal you of the disease of sin, Jesus!

Just as Jesus entered the Temple to clear-out the evil within it, He enters the temple of our hearts and finds a vileness that has no business being in the Christian's heart. And He cleanses our hearts and makes us righteous in God's sight. Just as Jesus suffered for the sins of those who bought, sold, and exchanged money in the temple. He has also suffered the punishment for

our sin of lacking proper zeal for His House. For those times when our hearts aren't focused on God and His Word. When we just go through the motions of worship.

The money changers had overstepped their bounds and injected the profane into the Divine. And Jesus defended the sacred space of His Father's House.

What, if anything, would God drive out of our sanctuaries in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod? Scripture tells us that we aren't to add to, or take from, the Word of God, the Gospel of Christ and the Cross. Nor are we to take the sacred out of the sacred space to compete for would-be church shoppers by conforming to the ways of the world within our worship of God.

God comes to us in the Divine Service with His gifts of Word and Sacrament. His Word is to be rightly divided between Law and Gospel. His Sacraments of Baptism and The Lord's Supper are to be administered according to God's Word in purity and truth. The sacred things of God are to be handled with reverence and awe in order that our souls, weakened by sin, are fed God's gifts of forgiveness, life, and Salvation. Gifts that come by way of our Redeemer, Jesus' perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection, and by the free gift of faith to believe in Him. We then, are able to better persevere in a world that is relentless in its denial of God and the sacred things of God and His Son Jesus.

Look up at the ceiling of this sanctuary. It is tall and expansive. In all honesty, it was built with the intention of making us feel small. Because it is only then, as we realize our smallness and insignificance in relation to our Creator, that we begin to grasp the wonder of God. Who, in time, descended from heaven taking on our flesh to save us, sinners that we are, by dying on a Cross. Thus, we have become **“a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.** We are God's special possession because Christ, who, turned over the tables in the Temple had the tables turned on Him.

Jesus went from beloved Son to despised sinner. From life in a manger to death on a Cross. He who knew no sin became sin. The Lamb of God became the Sacrificial Lamb. It is the great reversal. His death for our life. Our sins for His righteousness. It is a turning of the tables.

And during Lent we continue to see that the tables are turned. The Holy, righteous Son of God became the worst sinner on earth as He took on our sins. We who are guilty of sin are cleansed of sin through Baptism and made righteous and holy. We become sons and daughters of God. The tables are turned.

Jesus got what we deserve. We get what He deserved. Jesus got lashed with whips. We get caressed in God's loving arms. Jesus got nailed to a Cross and shed His blood. We get His Holy precious blood and broken body for the forgiveness of our sins at His Holy Meal. Jesus got driven out of God's house to die. We get invited into God's house to live. The tables are turned. It is the great reversal! A turning of the tables.

The only way you could and can be saved is if the tables were turned on Jesus. You, who deserves to die for your sins, is given life through Christ's death. You who lives in darkness has the Light of Christ shined into your life. You who should be nailed to a cross is spared as Christ was nailed to The Cross, in your place. Christ was punished. And you are given the grace, love, and mercy of God that Jesus deserves, but earned by Him and given to you. Jesus had the tables turned on Him that you may come to His Holy Meal at His table and have a place at God's table eternally in heaven. In the name of Jesus. To God be the glory. Be still and know He is God. **Amen.**