

Sermon – John 2: 13-22

Lent 3

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Well, some of you will be journeying through Lent with our study, Meeting Jesus in the Gospel of John. Over the last two weeks, we have been reflecting on how God is love and how God abides in us, and then last week on the Word made flesh in Jesus. Each day we have a verse from the writings of John as well as a reflection from the Brothers of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist to consider, and through this, develop our own faith narrative. Our reflections have been on Jesus, both human and divine. So, it's very good today to be able to share with you this story of Jesus at the Temple. It's a story which showcases the good news of both his humanity and his divinity, and in doing so, it asks us to explore how we are cleansing our own temples, our embodied selves, in preparation for his glorious resurrection on Easter Day.

Well, I'm thinking that many of us have heard this story before. It's related in all four of the Gospels and usually told after Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of his last Passover week. The Gospel of John is different however. Here, the story is placed in chapter two, after the prologue and the calling of the disciples in chapter one, and the story of the wedding at Cana, which is only told in this Gospel. John's use of these two stories for chapter two is another indicator, along with his often poetic language with frequent use of metaphor, that his approach to Gospel writing is somewhat different to the others.

At one level, the stories of Jesus turning water into wine and then turving out the traders from the house of God can be viewed as quite explicit signposts of his ministry and also his identity. John is very upfront throughout his Gospel about who Jesus is. But at another level, this chapter is about our transformation through the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the wedding story, we are transformed, like water into wine, when we do what Jesus tells us. The Temple story however, represents transformation on a much larger scale.

Jesus travels to Jerusalem and the Temple for Passover. He goes to the place that is central to Jewish worship and practice, at the time of one of the holiest of Jewish festivals. And the place is full of people coming from near and far to make their sacrifices at the temple, and to pray and to worship God. Our scripture says that:

“In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and

overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

Jesus gets angry. His humanity is on full display in this scene. Somewhat like when he weeps for Lazarus or when he despairs in the Garden of Gethsemane. It's moments like these that we know he understands us, because he has been angry, he has been sad, he's been tempted, he's despaired. There's nothing about our human condition that God doesn't get.

And then we have the climax of our story. The Temple authorities, no doubt put out by this uproarious scene, challenge Jesus.

"What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' They then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body.

This is the message. The transformation is not only about personal transformation, but about the transformation of the community of faith and the church for whom John was writing, as they very painfully separated from their Jewish brothers and sisters. This is about a change from worshipping God located in the holiest place, accessed only by the priests in the temple, to God who came to us in human form, not confined to a building, but located within the temple of the body of Jesus Christ. This transformation is about worshipping God who suffered, died and was buried, and who on the third day rose again, thereby changing the meaning and the focus of our worship. Our worship is relational, with a God who understands us to our very core. Chapter two of John's Gospel is a reflection on its overall message of the good news of the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

So, where will you meet Jesus this week? How will you relate to God? Will you meet him in scripture, in the stories of his humanity and his divinity? Or, perhaps you meet Jesus in worship, in the music, the liturgy, in holy communion. Perhaps you meet Jesus in the world outside, in the beauty of creation or in the people you meet and serve, or who serve you. Perhaps you find Jesus in prayer and meditation. In whichever way that you connect with our amazing God, you can be transformed.

Why not make this Lent a time for renewal of your own temples? A time to confront some of the brokenness in your own lives and bring this brokenness to Jesus, who surely knows all about brokenness.

Let us end in prayer: Loving and gracious God, we give you thanks for your transforming Son, Jesus Christ. Give us strength and courage for our Lenten journeys, whatever they involve; prayer, fasting, acts of service. Keep us strong in your faith and alert to your love and grace. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.