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Lent 3 Year B

John 2:13-22

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- Let's start by talking about animal sacrifices. It matters.
 - The reason? The author of John's gospel is very specific as to what is being sold in the marketplace of the temple: cattle, sheep and doves. Why? God's law commanded the sacrifice of certain animals, in very specific ways
 - This was done to honor God in atonement for sin,
 - Note: The sacrifices were commanded by God as a gift of grace, not punishment.
 - Sin = Death. And sinners could not stand before God.
 - To atone for human sin, an animal has to die. Humans received divine forgiveness through the death of something else.
 - Or "to please and honor God with a pleasant odor."
 - Not really about the delicious scent of cooking meat. The smoke and scent rises to the place where it was understood God resided, letting God know that a sinner was repentant.
- The next thing you need to understand is this: Sacrificial animals needed to be "blemish-free."
 - People traveled great distances to get to the temple; it wasn't practical to bring a sacrificial animal with them.
 - Market was in the outer courtyard, separate from the holy space.
 - Provided opportunity to purchase a healthy, "unblemished" animal to atone for one's sin
- Moneychangers also served a purpose
 - Travelers from distant lands needed local currency to make purchases.
- None of what Jesus finds is new, so what set him off?
 - First, Jesus' own words, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace."
 - The people selling animals and exchanging currency were doing so at rates far above market value, putting profit above service.
 - Jesus is inaugurating an entirely different world, where animal sacrifices are not part of humanity's relationship with God.

- “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’” This is a messianic act!
 - Notice that no one disputes Jesus’ actions. Instead, they ask for proof of why he did it.
 - Jesus’ response? Tear this entire thing down! I’ll rebuild it in three days.
 - “But that’s impossible! It’s taken us 46 years to get to this point!” (And it wasn’t done yet!)

- And then we get the Gospel writer’s editorial thoughts, “But he was speaking of the temple of his body.”
 - We who know well the end of Jesus’ story already know this, don’t we?
 - Jesus will die and, with his death, demonstrate God’s power over all forms of sin and, when he is found alive three days after his burial, even over death.
 - We also know that Jesus wasn’t *just* speaking of the temple of his body.

- Jesus’ overthrowing of the tables is also the first sign that he is overthrowing worship as it has been understood for generations.
 - No longer do people have to travel long distances to find the place where God resides.
 - No longer do people have to sacrifice an animal in order to be “righteous” and “clean” for God.
 - No longer, in fact, is “righteousness” and “cleanliness” even a requirement for a relationship with God.

- John’s gospel is always best read through a Resurrection Lens.
 - God is present wherever humanity is present. Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we know that we are the body of Christ
 - God chose to sacrifice his son and, in doing so, superseded any future need for animal sacrifices.
 - Because of Jesus, even sinners can stand before God
 - God is love
 - God’s sacrifice was enough.
 - And those of us who are baptized into Jesus’ death and resurrection also know this: Righteousness comes through the Sacrament, when we are marked with the cross of Christ and claimed by God forever.