



**St John's United Church of Christ  
Pastor's Lenten Devotion / Prayer for  
The Third Week of Lent  
Wednesday, March 10, 2021 7:00 pm**

Greetings St John's Family,

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if Jesus, in human form, came to visit the church, on a Sunday morning or anytime when people were gathered together. Someone said to me once that it would be "joyful beyond amazing." Well, there is a passage in scripture about what happened when Jesus visited the temple in Jerusalem in the days leading up to the Jewish feast of the Passover.

Our reading is from the gospel of John 2: 13-22: <sup>13</sup>The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup>In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

<sup>17</sup>His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup>The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

<sup>19</sup>Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup>The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"

<sup>21</sup>But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup>After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Paul Harvey told about a robber in Oceanside, California wearing a motorcycle helmet and carrying a gun who walked into a branch bank. He selected a teller who appeared fiftyish, soft, kindly, an easy mark. He handed her a note demanding money or her life. The woman reached for the cash drawer. Then she looked again at the note and her eyes flashed, her lips clenched.

She pulled the entire cash drawer out, but instead of giving him money, she clobbered the robber over the head with the drawer. And again and again. She was scolding him. Money was flying everywhere and she was beating him and shouting shame on him and bouncing blows off his helmet, until the young man turned and ran. Police caught him in nearby shrubbery. Then they asked the woman teller how come she was about to give him money at gunpoint and then, suddenly, instead, became enraged? She said, "In his note there was a very naughty word."

Different people get upset at different things. But there are times when all of us get angry. We are triggered by something and the anger comes immediately. Jesus' anger was triggered that day as he walked through the temple and it wasn't a pretty sight.

What was he so mad about? In those days, one could come to the temple to make a sacrifice for one's sins by sacrificing a dove or some other small animal. They were not allowed to pay for these items with the Roman currency. They had to change their money into the temple currency. If you've crossed into Canada, for instance, you may have changed your money into Canadian dollars. And what happens when you do? The person changing the money takes their percentage out of it. The money changing and the animal sacrifices provided ways for entrepreneurs to make some money. It's thought that they sometimes overcharged for these things. This kind of exorbitant money making riled up our Lord as he walked through the Temple.

I remember a fellow in my first congregation who wielded a lot of influence in the church who cited this passage as declaring that there should be no church fund raisers. And so there were no fund raisers in that church.

The Pharisees and the religious leaders of their times made a lot of rules on how to properly live out the old testament law. We make a lot of rules and sometimes the original purpose of a rule is no longer relevant. It becomes a hindrance to the good we can accomplish today. Jesus saw an emphasis on form over substance and it triggered his anger. The substance, friends, is a strong and vibrant relationship with God within the church community and personally, within your heart and mine.

What would Jesus see and react to if he were to visit the church, in the flesh, on Sunday morning? I hope he would see a groundswell of love, compassion, and faith even if all the l's were not dotted and t's were not crossed.

On this third week of the season of Lent. Let's examine our hearts. Are we giving allegiance to the form of religion or to its substance?

Prayer: Loving God, as we travel through this season of lent, we pray for your wisdom and your love to guide our lives anew. As we examine the way we live, love, and serve you, we are sorry for the times we practice the traditions of the faith but fail to hear your invitation perhaps do thing in a different way that may bring us into a closer walk with you. May we choose to do so this day. Amen.

Blessings!

Pastor Jeff Johnson

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