

**Sermon: Walking Toward a Walking Temple****Scripture: John 2:2-13****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: March 3, 2024**

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Our walk with Jesus through the season of Lent to the cross of Good Friday in about 3 weeks and then beyond brings us this morning to a difficult moment with him.

Have you ever had an experience where someone makes a terrible scene in a public place, like a fight breaks out or someone begins yelling at someone else or you witness some kind of accident where the automatic pilot that you and everyone around you had been running on in your day is shaken and you suddenly find yourself in a situation of heightened tension and heightened awareness and the normal things you were going along with give way to this realization that you actually have *no idea* what's going to happen next. We never really know what's going to happen next but things tend to follow patterns that allow us to settle into assumptions and habits and daily life... until they don't.

So when you are driving back from a really nice week of skiing where you've left all daily life and news behind you and suddenly you get this call on your phone from the ministry team at the church who say – we think we need to cancel worship this Sunday because of this virus they're talking about – it's dizzying almost in its disorientation and you realize you have no idea what actually comes next. That's how the pandemic started for me. I was kind of out of time snowboarding out in Colorado with my nephew and then I flew back to Boston and the next day the lockdown pretty much began. For anyone who has gotten a phone call about a sudden death or accident of a loved one, you know this

disorientation and horror only too well. It can happen on the positive end of things too of course – the first time you meet your soul mate, the love of your life, can also be one of those moments, where you have no idea what comes next, but hey in that instance “bring it on! This woman carrying those trays to the kitchen at a café called the Pantry in Washington Depot, CT with a name tag that said Tracy on it. Uhm, I think I’ll take the unknown of the future with her, please!”

All of that is to say, it was one of those disorienting, time out of time, moments for anyone who happened to be around when Jesus went into the temple and turned over those tables and drove people and animals out of there. For some it might have been an exciting shattering and wondering what the future would hold but for most it was a frightening moment when the normalcy of everyday life with stable institutions and a certain class system and steady processes that governed it all was suddenly shattered by a madman - some would say.

In the Gospel of John, unlike the other Gospels, it is early on in chapter 2 when Jesus throws over the tables in the temple. The story is there in the other Gospels as the last straw that actually triggers the authorities to arrest Jesus, but here it’s one of the first straws or “signs”, as John puts it, of the radical game-changing nature of this man from Nazareth called Jesus, yeah that’s right, a peasant man, the son of Mary and Joseph the carpenter.

In reading the account in the other Gospels you might interpret the turning of the tables as a challenge to the practices of making a commodity out of religion which of course benefitted the power holders and exploited the poor and while that’s not exactly absent here in John’s account, it’s really less that call to reform and more a tearing down of the whole system to replace it with something else

altogether. It would be akin to someone coming in not to reform capitalism to make it fairer but to proclaim capitalism as a corrupt system that needs dismantling... and then witnessing a public display of protest that is seriously disruptive and a promise that "it's only the beginning, just you wait and see!" That's what Jesus' turning over the tables was like and it had people troubled and furious, fascinated and frightened.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' act is a street theatre moment in which he proclaims himself to be the Messiah. In Hebrew scriptures cleansing the temple was understood as one of the signs of the Messiah, that he would come in and clear out and overturn the temple practices and inaugurate the Kingdom of Heaven (Ezekiel 9). Jesus says destroy this temple and in 3 days I'll raise it up, suggesting that he himself would be the new temple, the Messiah, and the religious leaders at least if not everyone else, got it! Jesus becomes the temple, the seat of the holiness of God. So now all the procession and walking toward the temple for high holy days and festivals is supplanted by a walk towards a walking breathing living temple in Jesus Christ.

So what does it mean to walk to the temple and to find the temple walking away? Well, here are 4 implications of Jesus being the temple toward which we now walk:

First of all, we are not going to the temple or to the church as the primary place to look for God or find God. Because Jesus proclaims that he is the new temple and because His spirit is in no one place but everywhere, we go everywhere to look for God. You've heard that one of Mother Theresa's spiritual practices was to look for Jesus in everyone that she encountered. That wasn't just a pious expression of hers but a spiritual discipline of hers. Looking for and

encountering Jesus in the people around her. Looking not to church or temple for the image of God but to one another for that image. What if we really tried to do that the coming week to open ourselves to experiencing Jesus Christ, God, in our encounters with others – there he is in that act of generosity, in that response, in those eyes, in that lost person, that great sorrow, there's Christ in them.

Secondly, Jesus becoming the temple means that we are not so much focused on the static place of practice and tradition as sacrosanct, but on the dynamic movement toward the future. Because Jesus is a walking savior, he hardly ever stopped even when they literally pinned him down, we shouldn't be overly obsessed with preserving the past so much as open to and seeking out a more God-filled future. OR maybe I should say our preserving of past tradition should be in service to future fulfillment in God. What does that mean for our individual lives? What does that mean for us as a community of faith, in this church? What does that mean for the future of our country?

Third, walking with a walking temple of Spirit means we are not going somewhere to receive something for our lives so much as we are moving out to the world to give of our lives to others. Church and temple doesn't become a place where we go to get spiritualized or have spiritual experiences or get restored and renewed – I mean, great if it also includes those things - but the heart of it is that we receive the body and blood of Jesus at this table not for what we get out of it but so that we can carry him out from church to live the dynamic life of Jesus in the world beyond these walls, a life of compassion, mercy, forgiveness, nonviolence, generosity, hospitality, justice, love.

Fourth, akin to finding Jesus out in the world, the temple in ancient Judaism was a seat of holiness and when Jesus becomes the temple and his invisible spirit

floods the world then holiness itself is no longer sequestered in holy places but floods the world and can be located in everything and everywhere. Yes, this is a holy place here in this sanctuary but so is David Page's office at Harvard or Sarah Gallop's office at MIT and so is Carolyn Plosky's classroom at Lynch and so is Mike Bailey's financial office at.... And so is Betsy Goodell's nonprofit and so is Joani Valeriano's auditing office at Northeastern and... holiness is potentially everywhere.

Finally, to point to the quote from GK Chesterton that was in our weekly newsletter this week, what this walking toward a walking temple means is that religion is not so much a theory and a dogma and an assent to doctrine as it is a journey and a love affair. If you could boil down the issue that Jesus takes with his religion, you might say it's that it was all theory and dogma, law and observance of ritual but had come to lack the vitality and dynamism of an actual relationship with the living God! So when Jesus becomes the temple himself it's clear that religion isn't about a place but about a state of the heart, not about theory but about a love affair, it's why Jesus was so frustrated and came bustin' up things like he did. They were missing the point and the point was a beautiful, powerful life-enhancing, life-transforming thing being offered and being missed! That's what Jesu invites us into in our walk with him, a love affair of the heart with the Sovereign of the Universe.

I hope that somewhere along the way of this Lent you'll get a taste of that in your walk with Jesus.