

3.3.2024 Lent 3

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22

“Hope beyond ourselves”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

On Sunday mornings, we’re used to reading brief portions of the Bible. This is a great way to focus on biblical stories, but at times we also miss out on the “big picture” of God’s word. For example, the big picture presented by John’s gospel is the message about Jesus as “*the Word made flesh*.” Jesus is the embodiment of God’s eternal and creative Word.

John’s gospel proclaims Jesus in many ways, for example, as the source of “living water” and as “the words of eternal life.” Jesus also reveals himself as “the bread of life,” “the light of the world,” “the good shepherd,” and “the resurrection and the life.” Jesus’ embodiment as the creative Word, “the way and the truth and the life,” prepares the world for that time he announced was coming when people would worship the Father in spirit and truth.

Today’s gospel about Jesus’ driving the merchants and money changers from the temple lifts this “big picture” about the God of the first commandment: “*You shall have no other gods before me*.” Jesus is announcing a future moment when his resurrection body will become the means of grace in the worship of God in spirit and truth. His words foreshadow the end of a sacrificial system by announcing the coming of a new temple of grace in his body the church.

When people came to the temple in Jerusalem, they exchanged Roman coins for the Jewish shekel and money changers at the temple entrance charged a fee for this service. Merchants also sold doves, sheep, and cattle, which were used for sacrificial offerings in the temple. The temple housed a sacrificial system of atonement for sin, and people profited from this. Imagine what our church would be like if we had money changers at the entrance; birds, sheep, and cattle for sale; and a high altar upon which we daily made burnt offerings to God for our sins.

Jesus’ words “*Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!*” questioned the very center of sacrificial temple life, so it is understandable that temple leaders asked Jesus, “*What sign can you show us for doing this?*” The sign Jesus gave began to be understood by early Christians in the events of history. In 70 CE, Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed by a Roman army led by Titus, the future emperor. Since John’s gospel was written about thirty years after this, those who heard John’s gospel knew that the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed, and with it, a way of sacrificial worship and atonement.

Though this helps us understand John's comment about Jesus' disciples remembering these words after his resurrection, it is hard for me to imagine the sorrow and lament of the disciples, Jewish Christians, and the Jewish people at the tragic loss of a city and temple of worship. Yet these disciples and early Christians also began to understand the promise of Jesus' body raised and alive in a new way – as a temple of grace, his body the church. As Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well who worshiped on a different mountain yet told her the time was coming when all people would worship God in spirit and truth, we pray as Christ's body amid today's brokenness that God hear the prayers and comfort cries of all people wherever they worship.

Many of us probably have made a church, roof, and steeple with our hands and fingers, then reversing our hands to show “all the people inside.” Christ's body is raised and alive dwelling in all people who are his church throughout the world. Together, our bodies build up the church. Together, we are the body of Christ.

As Jesus' disciples remembered his words, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up,*” they began to understand Jesus in his resurrection body as the new temple, a place of prayer, praise, worship, and service to others. This shift of understanding about worship and the commandment to “*remember the Lord your God,*” is something we take for granted, but rarely unpack as God's spirit and truth continually being revealed in the midst of the world. Jesus' resurrection and ascension replaced the sacrificial system of the temple, as the power of Jesus alive in Holy Spirit gathering his body from all nations. The body of Christ is a global house of prayer where God is worshiped in spirit and truth, no longer bound by time and space.

Jesus' cleansing of the temple foreshadowed the end of a sacrificial system of economic transactions between humans and God. Grace is free through faith to all who believe. We cannot purchase grace, and grace cannot be bought. This is countercultural in our world. We are taught, “you get what you pay for,” and though we say, “the best things in life are free,” we know that quality is an expensive commodity. Our economic system is based upon financial transactions, yet Jesus is saying “no” to any kind of financial transaction that seeks to earn God's grace and forgiveness. Grace is free to all who believe.

Jesus' words about “*my Father's house*” also point the new “*oikos*” or “household” of God in which all nations and peoples come to worship God in spirit and truth. In the body of Christ, the worship of God is no longer limited to one specific place, nation, language, or people. Yet we live in a world that has progressively alienated nations and peoples from one another through

ideologies of economics and nationalisms that blur our common kinship as members of God's household and human family.

We spend much of our time looking at screens and devices that alienate us from one another, while mistaking reality for something virtual and unreal. Isolated from one another, we are tempted to focus solely upon our own concerns and desires rather than upon the concerns and needs of others. As technology seeks to control every aspect of our lives, we are in danger of losing the spiritual dimension of our humanity and our bodies. We are in danger of losing sight of worshipping the Father in spirit and truth. Christ's risen body overcomes our alienation, restoring us to community with God and with one another.

In the cross at the high altar, we see the bodily image of Jesus who emptied himself as a servant, not for profit and power, or to oppress or kill, but to offer new life and grace by freeing us to live in unity with him and the world as his body, the church.

This is the "big picture" – Each of our bodies are part of his body, no matter our backgrounds, gender, identity, nationality, or abilities, because our bodies have been clothed with Christ in Holy Baptism, we are his body visible in this world.

In a world that continues to exploit, discriminate against, and even kill the bodies of others, Jesus' cross reminds us of the big picture: The God who so loves this world, continues to send his risen Son to share in the humanity of every human being, every human body, every person.

Jesus' resurrection body is visible in this world when his church loves and cares for those whose bodies are excluded, oppressed, and weak. When we live for others, we offer hope beyond ourselves. We become Jesus to others who are broken in body and spirit.

Jesus lives raised in you. Look to his cross and know that he dwells in you. You are the living stones of his body, the church.

He lives through you sharing his spirit and truth. Amen.