

When Tables are turned

John 2:13-22

Slide: WWJD? Turn tables

Every now and then we have to be reminded that our Lord Jesus didn't only talk about loving God and the neighbor. He got perturbed when we didn't do those things. And, further than that, he took action. As Pastor Nate indicated in his sermon last week, Lent is often a time when we are reminded just how far away from God we often get, both in our way of life that we justify and in our relationship with Christ, who although looking like he is having a very bad day in the Gospel reading for today, still longs to die for us, even after all that.

Over and over I have read the passages this "cleansing of the temple" and over and over, each and every year, I tend to want to gloss over it. For those of you who know me very well, you know that I tend towards believing

that it's more important to focus on the positive than the negative because let's just face it, we tend towards the negative naturally anyway. This world does indeed need more positivity.

Slide: Don't Worry...

However, one thing this world does not need is positivity that has no action in it. That is, pushing happy for happiness sake doesn't help anything and really, it's not very genuine. So, even though I tend towards positivity to make changes in my life and to encourage positivity in yours, some days, we just need Jesus to overturn some tables.

Slide: Pointing Fingers

These last couple of weeks in Lent, we have needed Jesus to do just that. Our beloved nation, as wonderful and good as it can be in principle, traditionally has called itself a Christian nation, but perhaps you wonder as I do that instead it is a complete mess. I suppose it always has been in many ways, but lately, it seems even messier than

usual. We have problems, dear people of God. And, when I say problems, I mean gun violence, racism, poverty, sexism, just to name a few. Were those problems there before two weeks ago, yes. I'm not saying they weren't there before, but you and I both know that there has been a clamoring and a growing of tensions in this country for some years - and I mean even neighbor against neighbor, sometimes Christian neighbor against Christian neighbor.

Slide: Love God, Love Others

Now, before you start squirming in your seats about politics and religion, let me set your minds at ease...at least mostly. It's not my job to tell you what we should believe about guns and policies about them. But, it is my job to tell you that scripture isn't silent about all these kinds of problems as modern as they may be. Jesus, I'm sure, is turning tables on us even today. And, here is where our system is broken, and this includes the holy church catholic, of which we are a part:

Instead of wondering why Jesus turns tables, we instead do everything we can to put the tables back where they were before Jesus overturns them.

Let me explain what I mean. The Gospel reading for today, shows us a God who does not like unjust and unfair systems. In those ancient of days during the time of Jesus, the way people confessed and atoned for their sinful nature was to sacrifice an animal to the Lord at the temple. Imagine now this scene: You are poor, but you come to the temple to atone for your sins and can't afford even a pigeon to give to God.

The money- changers, who were in league with the religious leaders, would hike up their prices so high that only the wealthiest could afford to enter the temple with the proper animal for sacrifice. Or, perhaps as a poor family, you would have to scrimp and save enough money throughout the year, denying yourself even the most basic necessities, so that you could have that access to

the temple that you hoped to have.

Ultimately, only those with the most could afford forgiveness where they could atone for their sins before God. The forgiveness of sins had become a human commodity, a marketplace, and there were business owners and religious leaders who cashed in, making those people very wealthy. Now, if that doesn't cause Jesus to turn over some table, I don't know what would.

Ok, so that's the historical back story. This is why Jesus is upset, but what happens after? This week, for the first time, I wondered the following: After Jesus turned the tables, sent the coins flying, and shooed all the cows and sheep outta there, what did the moneychangers and the religious leaders do and I mean, right after that happened?

It doesn't say. But, here's what I'm thinking they did because it's human nature. They put the tables back up, put the coins back on the table, found the animals and went on selling their sacrifices, trying to

ignore what happened, all the while stealthily trying to suppress Jesus' ministry and ultimately kill him. It's likely that they tried to continue in their horrible practices rather than looking down deep to see if the system for which they were already benefitting was corrupt. In other words, it's likely nothing changed because it's possible they didn't want it to, it was too hard to change it, or it threatened the way of life they were used to.

Slide: Jesus Cleans Temple

But, this is why Jesus was crucified. The desire to keep things as they were was higher than changing something. And, they were willing to do anything to make it stay that way - no listening sessions, no compromise, no trying to walk in the other person's shoes at all.

I'm not an expert in how things ought to change in the greater church, country and the world. I have some opinions. I know you do, too. And, I know that all of us can be stubborn enough to not want to give budge on our opinions and not

take the time to intently listen to the other side. It's likely that we have such diverse opinions even in this congregation that the neighbor next to you may think exactly the opposite of you and wonder how it is you got to that opinion... But, this is where I love the church because this fact alone I feel can lead us to how we are to better be in the world. Did you ever think about the fact that you may be at the communion rail with someone who thinks completely the opposite on gun policies than you do?

Slide: Compassion

And, yet, the church is now one of the only remaining places we still have in this country with that luxury – the luxury of seeing each other as human beings, working at loving each other, having compassion for each other and our problems, and hopefully listening to each other's views and still be at the communion rail together. God be praised for that.

But, outside these walls, we are followers of Jesus there, too, where our lives go from

this place; we are called to allow Jesus to overturn tables in our lives personally, but also in our society. So, here's what I think we need to take some time thinking about together:

Slide: Destroy this Temple

In what way is Jesus really fed up with our corporate behavior as Americans towards the neighbor just in our own country right now...And, in our practices towards our neighbors...And, in our language towards our neighbors – who differ from us, have other opinions than us, some of who need to have tables turned to open their eyes so that they may see the neighbor *they* are to love? We have an obligation as followers of Christ. And here is what it is:

- Not to put the tables that were turned, the coins, and animals back where they were before Jesus uprooted them, hoping it will all go away, or apathetic about it, but to work towards picking up our cross and following

Jesus – of promoting the Kingdom of God in this world, the peaceable Kingdom Christ died to be in relationship with – A Kingdom that raises up the least of these among us.

- AND – to take a hard look at our own selves personally, to see where our stubborn hearts are being overturned by Jesus, and taking some responsibility in being a part of the solution, and not by just going back to the easy places in our lives, hoping it will go away.

Because the death of Jesus changes us. Or, at least it ought to. Jesus died not only to free us from our sins. Jesus died also to show us a way of life – a way that is living as Christ does. Sometimes, just sometimes, that means allowing Jesus in to turn the tables on us. Maybe that sometimes is now.

But, in that is grace, too. With Christ's dying on the cross, we are able to travel to

that cross daily in the waters of Baptism, and there, we can together accept our part in the problem while also being redeemed from it, freed to be brothers and sisters and Christ's body in the world.

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." Amen.