

03/03/24

Exodus 20:1-17 & John 2:13-22

A Time to Get Angry

I know I'm not the only person who experiences discomfort from hearing Jesus' fighting words in the gospel passage Linda just read. On Wednesday evening at choir rehearsal when I saw Linda she said, "I've never liked that passage." She didn't elaborate but I think I know what she means. Today's gospel passage does not present Gentle Jesus Meek and Mild but rather paints an image of a ferocious, table turning, whip making, drive-out-the-money-changers Jesus. This is the passage that's often referenced by people who make the Biblical case that Jesus was not always sweet and kind.

In 25 years of ordained ministry, I've managed to avoid preaching on the passage of angry Jesus overturning the tables in the temple. Today, I'm facing my fears and together we're going to see what we can learn as a body from an angry, table turning, temple destroying Jesus who speaks of his body as the temple.

All four gospel writers portray Jesus displaying unbridled anger as he drives out merchants or money changers from the Jerusalem temple however it's only in John's Gospel where this event appears at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and it's only in John's Gospel where Jesus references his body as the temple. Jesus speaks and acts against temple corruption and defilement (which is how the passage is often interpreted). In this passage Jesus also correlates the temple with the body.

The Rev. Mary Hinkle Shore writes,

“The temple was understood to be the meeting place between the God of Israel and God’s people. Sacrifices were offered during religious festivals and at special times in people’s lives, such as in honor of a birth or in thanksgiving for a harvest. The temple was a **holy place**. It was a place where human life and divine blessing met.

In John’s Gospel, the body of Jesus is the new ‘holy place.’ [In John 1:14 we read] ‘The Word became flesh, and lived among us.’ With the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, God’s dwelling place is with humans, as a human. So Jesus baits the Jewish leaders: ‘I dare you: destroy *this temple*, and in three days I will raise it up.’”¹

Jesus’ baiting of the authorities (as Shore calls it) confuses everybody (in the way John’s Gospel is often confusing). Jesus challenges everyone he encounters to find and discover ways in which they are able to meet God. He says, “You’re in the presence of the living God and I’m going make sure you are made aware of that fact because it seems like you’ve forgotten this, or you don’t realize this. Starting in three days, the body is the temple where God dwells.”

Recall some of the confusion or misunderstanding that has been expressed in John’s Gospel after an encounter with Jesus—after meeting the living God. In John 3 the learned Pharisee Nicodemus asks Jesus, “How can anyone be born after having grown old . . . how can these

¹ “Commentary on John 2:13-22” by Mary Hinkle Shore. www.workingpreacher.org 3/4/18

things be?” (John 3:3, 9) In John 4 the woman at the well asks Jesus, “Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob?” (John 4:11-12)

There are many passages in John’s gospel when after reading them we find ourselves scratching our heads, asking questions, and being perplexed alongside those whom Jesus encounters. The passage from John 2 in addition to making us uncomfortable because of Jesus’ anger may cause misunderstanding and confusion.

Temple-based worship as referenced in John is pretty far removed from our experience. The kinds of sacrifices or ways in which sacrifices are offered are not what WE think of or care about. But what you and I DO think on and care about are the ways in which our lives intersect with the Holy, with the divine, with God. You and I do think about and care about ways we may meet, encounter, and know the living God.

Discovering and uncovering ways you and I meet the living God is part of the reason why we’re here this morning. We have faith that week after week God shows up for us and that this is a place where we meet God. Today as we celebrate the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we claim that God meets us in the bread and cup through the power of the Holy Spirit. We’re invited to show up for God at this table—the same place that God shows up for us.

In our Old Testament passage as the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness God showed up to the prophet Moses and gave the law. At its best, the law is a way of life that transforms the world into a way of living together with God. God says to the Hebrew people, “when you live

the life you are meant to live in the great house of creation, you shall have no other gods before me, remember the sabbath, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery. . .” The law describes the way we are meant to live with God and one another in the temple of creation. This is how God shows up for the people in the wilderness.

“The surprise in today’s gospel reading is that Jesus says that the transcendent is present in his body. The gospel of John makes this claim, that a human body — unique but also a lot like your body or mine — is the holy place of God. Jesus was not just ‘wearing’ a human body like a set of clothes. He *was* a human body, as inseparable from his body as you and I are from ours. And God was inseparable from him.”² That is the audacious claim of this passage in John 2.

I wonder if in addition to us thinking about where and in what ways God shows up for us, we might think about the ways in which we use our bodies to show up for God and communicate the love of God and the presence of God.

How does your body embody the truth of the Gospel?

How does this body of Potomac Presbyterian Church communicate the love of God?

How do you and I express through our bodies what it feels like to experience God’s grace through the sacrament?

During this Lenten season we remember a body in the wilderness, “a body anointed, a body beaten, a body on the cross, a body laid in a tomb. Lent invites a deep reflection on the role of

² Ibid.

bodies in faith and life. In the end, Jesus is saying that his body is the location of God. [I wonder if] your body and mine might be a location for God to dwell as well.”³

Let us this week engage in three Lenten practices that involve our bodies. These are practices that will help us show up for God:

1. Pay attention to the ways in which your body ministers.
2. Imagine how your body preaches.
3. Is there anything Jesus may want to drive out to restore a place of prayer in your body?

When Jesus gets angry in John’s Gospel Jesus is speaking of the temple of his body and how that body is treated.

Today, as we prepare to receive the sacrament Jesus says, this is my body given for you.

Remember Me. Amen

³ “An Embodied Lent” by Karoline Lewis. www.workingpreacher.org 3/1/15