

**3 Lent B March 7, 2021**  
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**Business as Usual**  
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The account of Jesus clearing the temple appears in all four Gospels and is considered by scholars and historians to be something Jesus actually did. It's historical. However, each Gospel describes Jesus clearing the temple a little differently, as each writer told the account through their own point of view. The Synoptic Gospels - those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, place this event toward the end of their Gospels, making it the penultimate event that pits the religious leaders against Jesus. These Gospels also name the reason for Jesus' anger and violence as economic injustice against the poor who were being taken advantage of by the money changers.

But the version of Jesus clearing out the temple we have today is from the Gospel According to John, and it differs significantly from the Synoptics. Instead of placing the event toward the end of the Gospel, the author of John puts it in the beginning, right after Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. John's Gospel includes details that are different from the versions in the Synoptics like naming the types of animals that were present in the temple available for purchase and excludes the accusation of unethical money changing practices.

One reason for all the differences might be that scholars believe John's Gospel was written much later than those of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Most likely John's Gospel was written sometime between 66-70 AD, which means it was written after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. The destruction of the temple was deeply traumatic and had a profound spiritual impact on Jews and Christians alike. It caused them to question the significance of the temple and to reflect on where God is present. For Jews, God became present in synagogues and the study of the Torah. For early Christians, God's presence is in the Body of Christ, the community of the baptized. The destruction of the temple caused a major shift in theology that named God's house to be in the midst of community instead of in a building.

This dramatic shift in theology is usually named as the reason for the different perspective. For John, this event is not what upset the religious leaders and convinced them to get rid of Jesus. Instead, it is a sign pointing to who Jesus is and what it means to be the Messiah.

A lot of people have told me Jesus clearing out the temple is one of their favorite stories in the Gospel. When I ask them why, they usually respond by telling me they appreciate seeing Jesus get angry and act on his anger. Maybe this is one of those moments when it's easy to relate to Jesus' humanity because he's expressing emotion. Many of the depictions of Jesus we see in movies and other forms of religious entertainment is that of a person who seems beyond human emotion, someone who is always calm and collected. That image can get stuck in our heads as what we imagine when we think of Jesus and can unconsciously influence how we see Jesus through scriptures. Very rarely do the Gospels include details of emotions. This is one of those rare times, which might make it easy for many of us to relate to Jesus in this moment.

The emotion he seems to be expressing so violently is anger. Anger is a strong emotion, one we all can relate to. In my pastoral care training I learned that anger is often a surface emotion for something deeper: like sorrow or fear or passionate care for someone or something. This can be helpful in trying to determine why Jesus threw such a violent fit, making a whip, driving out animals, overturning tables, driving out people, making a mess. What made Jesus so angry he resorted to violence?

Like I said before, the Synoptic Gospels tell us it was economic injustice- the money changers charging too much for their services that upset Jesus. But that is not the reason John gives. In John's Gospel Jesus is disturbed by practices that made God's house into a marketplace. What is being referred to is the practice of sacrificing an animal at the time of Passover. The traditional sacrifice was a lamb like in the Exodus story, but wealthier families might sacrifice a larger animal and poorer families would sacrifice a smaller one, or share a lamb with another family. There were catches of course. The animal being sacrificed had to be without any imperfections, not even a scratch to be considered worthy. For those who brought an animal from home, there were staff available to make sure it was blemish free. If any imperfection was found, there were animals raised by the temple they could purchase on site guaranteed to be worthy for the ritual. This was not a new practice. It was undoubtedly something Jesus and his family had participated in before. Showing up at the temple on Passover and finding this type of exchange was actually not a marketplace or a business suddenly appearing in the temple; it was business as usual.

Business as usual seems to be the author of John's bone of contention. For John, the ritual animal sacrifice is no longer necessary. Jesus cares deeply about humanity's relationship with God, and it's a relationship based on love. Through Jesus' death and resurrection Jesus has liberated humanity from the power of sin and death. Through his incarnation Jesus brought God into the midst of everyday life. Ritual sacrifice is no longer necessary. That is why the author of John had Jesus driving the sacrificial animals and the people who oversaw their purchase out of the temple in the beginning of the Gospel. In so doing, John is foreshadowing Jesus is the Messiah who through his death and resurrection undoes any need for ritual sacrifice and brings new resurrection life and relationship with God. With Jesus there will no longer be business as usual. There will be resurrection life, the stuff of God's Kingdom here on earth.

The phrase "business as usual" is one I am hearing more and more with every news article and opinion piece published along with the news that more people are receiving the COVID-19 vaccine. Since people are starting to get vaccinated, we are being promised our long period of isolating and mask wearing is nearing an end and soon we will return to "business as usual." A few officials and leaders have interpreted that to mean returning to business-as-usual right now, even though health experts warn we aren't there yet.

While I understand the desire to return to life without face masks and being able to gather in large groups, today's Gospel can give us reason to not want to return to business as usual. I'm not talking about prolonging the pandemic, I'm talking about those practices the pandemic revealed for being unjust that perhaps we should change instead of simply return to them. Things like the inequalities in our health care systems, or in employment. How it's been revealed the system of debt that had become acceptable prevents people from saving money and when job loss occurred put them in a desperate situation. The pandemic revealed many people didn't want to work from home, nor children do school at home because for them home is not a safe environment. The inadequacy of bandwidth inhibited education and work. The collective trauma of racism has on people of all races, as well as how the trauma of the pandemic had exacerbated mental and physical health issues for millions of Americans. These conditions existed before the pandemic; the pandemic just made them more visible.

Learning about or seeing these disparities can be discouraging, painful, and might feel overwhelming. Especially when we realize they have been here all along and we didn't see them. But when we look at them the way the author of John's Gospel ended our Gospel reading for today, through the lens of Jesus' resurrection, then perhaps we can have the courage and wisdom to also see a different way, a more Kingdom of God way forward.

As we get closer to what I hope are the final months of the pandemic, perhaps the goal isn't to return to business as usual. Perhaps the goal is to remember business as usual has already been driven away, which means we don't have to return to doing things the way we've always done them. If that sounds frightening, we can remember we aren't alone. God is in our midst, calling us to help make God's presence known here on earth to all people, working with us to do what we can to help bring God's kingdom closer to everyone.