

## Third Sunday in Lent (2018)

**John 2:13–22** The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

**So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking about the temple of his body.** When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

In the Name of Jesus.

Fellow redeemed:

NOW, the meeting place of God with Man is the Place of LIFE, no longer the place of death:

Christ's Body;

Christ's Spirit;

Christ's gifts;

Christ's Church;

Christ's Return!

And, most happily, you! You are That Place of Life; That Temple! Me too! Even the world, from whom the Lamb of God takes away sin!

'Whoa, there, pastor! What FOOLISHNESS you speak! (Our Dead Man inside objects!) You just read the Ten Commandments of Moses. And I do not need to look too far to see a bunch of LAW-breakin' goin' on in this WORLD you said has been saved! Maybe even in a nearby pew! And YOU flap your gums BOASTING that GOD the Father, His Risen Son and Glorious Spirit now LIVE—HAPPILY?!—with just WHOEVER?!

Ah! NOW we know why Jesus grabbed a whip that fine day! To drive out of the Father's house senseless brute BEASTS dead-set on PERISHING; as well as oxen, sheep and pigeons!

Teaching us, that not ONLY does the Lord have a heart for the poor, innocent, creatures of God that had NOTHING to do with making this world what it is. In His great mercy, along with saving from death those who cannot speak up for themselves, He is determined EVEN to save from death: you, me, the world!

‘Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it again.’

The Lutheran is a rare pigeon, my dear ones! For the whole point—the ONLY point that I understand!—about being a Lutheran, is because one cannot find a word, a syllable, a bleat or a coo, to excuse and defend oneself from Moses; and one is bursting with gladness that Jesus Christ is utterly different from the good ol' lawgiver.

I have my ‘relationship box’ up here again. (It's a good sized pencil box.) I'm obsessed with this imagery.

Recently, one of the world's favorite preachers assumed room temperature. I rarely listen to the news. But it even came through to ME what the man's message was to our country, to the world: 'God wants to have a relationship with you!'

I cannot sum up more perfectly why I thank God for the blessed Doctor Martin Luther! For Luther taught that the first thing that God wants you to GIVE UP—is trying to have a relationship with Him!

And I am NOT just picking at nits here!

The ONLY thing I understand about this 'relationship' business, is that it's like this box here that can hold things. A relationship is this 'thing' that stands between you and me, or me and my God—and you put in, and take out; or God; and then I put in, or take out. And every now and then—I have concluded it is moment by moment—some party to this relationship is free to check in the box, and weigh and measure and count and evaluate, to see if how much YOU have put into this thing we have going together matches up with the great contributions that I have made.

We might be fooled into thinking that the Old Testament, the Old Temple, the Old Ark of the Covenant was like that! For in the Ark, in the Temple, was the Law of Moses, which begins:

“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. “ Which our Old, perishing man inside says is the part God has put in. And then, the other shoe drops:

“You shall have no other gods before me.” And so, Israel of Old had its orders. Since God had done so much for them, there were things then that this God wanted FROM them. Copies of the Commandments were kept in the Ark, in the Temple. And whenever you went to pray to the God of Israel at the temple, it was a time of reckoning; a matter of life and death.

Jesus made a whip and saved beast and man that day, on His way to save the world.

Some centuries later, He made another whip—Martin Luther—to save the New Testament Church from the emporium and market and business it has become.

They killed the Master; they excommunicated and tried to kill His servant; and they ain't got much use for me or you either.

But for those who cannot contribute enough—OR ANYTHING!—to some sort of deal, some treaty, going on between the God of conscience and the conscience over which we have NO power—

Jesus' whip brings life, not death! Luther too!

Dr. Luther taught the Church, as Saint Paul did, that the LAW was ONLY revealed and threatened, because men had forgotten, or diminished, or thought foolish the Gospel, the promise of the Seed born of the woman to crush the serpent's head.

For when a man gladdens up and rises from despair at the Guarantee that God Himself, the Master of our conscience, will take away the bad conscience that no man can master—who would WANT any other God?

And who would ever dream that calling on His Name would ever be in vain? Or that His Word would not bring life, over and over, more and more?

And when the Spirit's hovers over His Creation—even you and me!—and hatches in us the little chick of trust in the Gospel, that IN...OUR...FLESH that is perishing, the IMPERISHABLE God assumes all we wreck and delivers all we lack!—

Then all the lesser, minor, and happy concerns of life must surely be in His gracious hand: parents and government, our neighbor's life, marriage, property and good name. And when our hearts would foolishly ache over what cannot last, then the Gospel brings the soothing relief that God is greater than our hearts!

The LAW, my dear Lutherans, is ONLY of use now, for US, to check and see if we are rejoicing in the New Temple, the New Ark, the New Treaty with God, the UN-RELATIONSHIP—Jesus, in Whom God gives all, does all, takes away all, answers all.

No man can love God or his fellow apart from the joy that the Son of God laid down His Life and picked it up again.

So, there you go!

If you find yourself out of whack with the Law—well then, do NOT imagine a relationship box between you and God, into which you had better get busy depositing something to gain traction with heaven!

Get religious! Go to church! Give offerings! Start praying more! Read that old Bible again. Do all that if you WANT! But first of all, SMASH any such box! (I'm not going to smash this one; I really like it!)

And rejoice that you have been baptized at Christ's authority! So that the Spirit Who thrives in Jesus without measure also thrives in you! Has to! For God's glory is made known chiefly in showing mercy, as our prayer teaches heaven today. And men did destroy the temple of Jesus' Body—they dreamed! And He raised it again. As if God was not even going to brood over THAT injustice!

And if the next man falls short of your code, your demands—or, yes, GOD'S demands too, whoop-dee-doo!—then what's wrong with the next man?

He needs more Moses?

More threats?

More weighing?

More counting, measuring, evaluating, investigating,  
demanding?

Nawp! That temple's done been burnt to the ground!  
And Christ has raised His Temple again, the Place where  
God meets with Man to live, never to die again!

The next man ONLY sins  
BECAUSE...SOMEONE...HAS...LIED...TO...HIM!  
Because SOMEONE—the old liar and murder, no doubt!—  
has stolen from that redeemed man THE...GOSPEL! That  
the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world! And  
that since God now wears our flesh and CANNOT shake it  
off, even if He wanted to---

God must be the next man's Father and Friend and  
Savior and Helper: his God! 'You shall have no other!'  
'Who WOULD?!'

Now, how is the next poor man, robbed of his faith,  
the Gospel, going to meet God and live now, rather than  
meet God's fists of the Law and be beat up?

The temple that is you, me, the Church, His gifts. The ONLY point that I see, of us receiving Jesus' Body and Blood today! So that WE would His living temples be. So that all other voices, besides the Gospel, would be silenced for good in the Name of Jesus. Amen.