

John 2:13-22

March 7, 2021

Are we shocked by what we read here? The people of Jerusalem surely were. The next morning, everyone over breakfast would have been talking about what Jesus did in the temple.

Since when does Jesus, who welcomes babies into His arms, make a whip and use it in anger? Since when does He who says, "*Come unto Me...*" drive people away? Since always. Way back at Mt. Sinai...you heard our first reading for today in Exodus 20...God told His people, "*I am a jealous God.*" Well, this jealous God in the temple is tossing tables, throwing coins everywhere, basically acting like a wild man.

Why hasn't a Christian artist done a painting of this scene, portraying Jesus with angry eyes using a whip of cords? It's obvious, right? This is hardly the Jesus we picture when we kneel down to pray. Not the Jesus we think of when we commend our dying loved one into His arms. "Take my loved one, Jesus, but first drop the whip from Your hands."

Was anyone here given these words in John 2 as your confirmation verse? I didn't think so. "Johnny, your verse is, "*Take these things away; do not make My Father's house a house of trade!*" Although I'm sure Johnny would never forget his confirmation verse.

So, what do we make of this? There are only two times I can think of when Jesus becomes really angry. Here in the temple, and when His disciples prevent little children from being brought to Him. What do these two things have in common? Perhaps this, they both present God as something He is not.

Jesus wants children, even the tiniest ones, yes even children still in the womb, to be brought to Him. But His disciples paint an opposite picture of Him by their actions, and this makes Him furious. Jesus wants the house of God to be seen as the house of mercy, not a house of trade. But the moneychangers paint an opposite picture to all who come to the temple, and this too, makes Him furious.

Sin all you want. Break all ten of the Commandments you heard in our Exodus reading this morning. I promise you this, you will not make God angry. Sad, yes. But angry, no. God's anger over sin is gone. He poured it all out on His Son at the cross. Jesus took all His wrath for you. Every sin is forgiven. Your Lord was punished for every sin of yours. So, no sin that you do can make God angry. But take His mercy, His forgiveness for sin, and withhold these from the weak and the helpless, those who need these gifts, and you have an angry God on your hands.

In the temple we see this angry God. What we see is zeal. Zeal is angry love. It springs, not from hatred, but from love toward God. We can also call zeal jealous love. Husbands and wives have zeal for each other. At least they should have. This zeal is not a jealousy of possessiveness, but one of love.

It's what God has for you. "*You are to have no other gods,*" He commands. What, is He jealous of me? You'd better believe it! Yes, He did create you, but even more, He brought you out of the house of slavery in your baptism. You became His bride in those waters. And what husband is okay with his wife fooling around with other men? Certainly not our Divine Husband.

God claimed you for His own, not for His sake, as if to puff up His ego, “Look at what a good catch I made!” But for your sake. Because if God does not claim you, Satan will. He also has zeal for you. Except that his zeal springs not from love, but from hatred. He hates God so much, and always will, so that he wants to take God’s dearest treasure away from Him, and that is you.

How does Satan operate to accomplish his evil purpose? By tempting us to sin, yes. But because all sin is forgiven, he must keep God’s mercy, His forgiveness, away from us. And so we see the devil working in the temple using the moneychangers, and those who authorize them, to turn God’s house of mercy into a house of trade.

What Jesus does with His violent actions is similar to a surgeon removing a cancerous growth from the body. He wields his scalpel like Jesus wields His whip. The surgeon acts in a violent manner on the body. Cutting open a person’s flesh is not gentle, but by its nature quite violent. Yet it is violence with a good purpose. To remove that which is evil from the body. And so Jesus acts in the same violent manner to remove the infestation of evil from the house of God.

Jesus is jealous for the house of God because the house of God is the place of mercy for sinners like us. It is here where Jesus wields, not a whip, but a scalpel. He is our Divine Physician. This is no place of business, and we dare not turn it into that. This is the place where we can come with all the vile, cancerous sin within us and be healed because Jesus is here with mercy and forgiveness for you.

Satan works against this. He is angry when you come here for mercy. He is angry when you hear and receive the word of Absolution as the word of Jesus to you. He is angry when you receive the Lord’s body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins.

But God is never angry with you. There is only love in His heart toward you. He is not your angry God, but your forgiving God...always. He holds no whip in His hand against you. He felt the whip for you. He felt the nails and the splinters of the cross. All for you. This means you are forgiven, my friend. Believe it. It is true.

This Gospel of forgiveness presents God for who He truly is. Your God is jealous for you. He is angry against Satan for you. And above all, your God counts you, yes you, you whom He has forgiven, as His dearest treasure. Amen.