

Many years before our text, when Jesus was twelve, Mary and Joseph found Him in the temple at Jerusalem. They were surprised, for they did not expect to find Him there. Yet their surprise was out of place, because Jesus was in the very place where He belonged.

We move forward about two decades, and it's Jesus who comes to the same temple, and now it's His turn to be surprised by what He finds. Although surprise is not the best word to use here. Perhaps anger is a better fit, righteous anger. And better yet, zeal.

He finds those selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons, and the moneychangers sitting there. He makes a whip, probably out of the ropes that were used to lead these animals into the temple. He drives them out, overturns their tables, the coins spilling everywhere, and He tells the sellers of the pigeons to take their birdcages elsewhere.

This is about as aggressive as we ever see Jesus being depicted by the Gospel writers. It's not that He woke up on the wrong side of the bed that morning. It's not that this was the last straw, and He finally became unhinged. Jesus is here carrying out His responsibility as the Messiah, the King who has come to His people.

In the Old Testament, kings Hezekiah and Josiah did the same thing. They cleansed the temple in Jerusalem of idols and pagan practices. This was their duty because they were the ones sitting on the royal throne. And now it's Jesus on the throne, which will be fashioned into the shape of a cross.

The prophet Malachi had written: "*The Lord...will suddenly come to His temple...But who can endure the day of His coming?*" Certainly not the moneychangers and those with them. They are furious at Jesus. They demand a sign to prove that He has the authority to act as He does here in the temple. His actions, in and of themselves, are a sign. Yet they reject this sign, just as they will reject the sign of His death and resurrection.

They are the ones in the wrong. The word *found* in the Greek here, telling us what Jesus found in the temple, means that what He found was not what should have been there. What was there in the temple was out of place. It did not belong there.

What, the animals? But the temple is where the animals are brought to be sacrificed. Coins? But coins are put into the temple's offering boxes. There are thirteen of them.

Before we go digging more into what is out of place there, should we not first take a good, hard look at ourselves? Jesus tells us, through His apostle, that you and I are temples. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. Is everything about you and me in place? Is everything in your life, and in mine, as it should be?

We should pay attention to Malachi's words. When the Lord suddenly comes to His temple, to you, to me, what will He find? Maybe He should make a whip as He did in Jerusalem. If we are

honest about what Jesus will find in us, we will admit that we deserve to have Him thrashing about using His whip, and overturning our lives, all in a very aggressive manner.

And it's because we have already done that in a very sinful manner. Your life is already overturned, as is mine. We have turned ourselves, whom God created right-side up, into an upside-down sinful mess. We have made whips for ourselves out of our hurtful words and gossip, and used them to whip others, even those in our families and our church family. Perhaps what Jesus found in the temple at Jerusalem is small in comparison to what He finds in us.

So, what does He find there in Jerusalem that is out of place, that is not as it should be? Sacrificial animals, yes. And coins, yes. But here's why these are out of place. It is the Passover when Jesus enters Jerusalem, and He Himself is the true Passover Lamb, the One to be sacrificed for sinners. Jesus is not just cleansing the temple; He is clearing it out. He is driving out every sacrificial animal because He alone is the only Sacrifice that can atone for your sin and mine. He is spilling the coins from the tables because His blood will be spilled from the cross, and all the coins in the world are not enough to pay that price, because it is freely given. What Jesus purchased by His blood is freely given to you: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

More, and so much better, than what Jesus finds in us, therefore, is what we find in Him. And what we find in Jesus is not out of place. In Jesus we find deep wounds from the whips of the soldiers. In Jesus we find nails driven into His hands and feet. We find a thorny crown pressed into His head.

And all these are as they should be. They are exactly where they belong – in Jesus, and not in you. He is the Lamb sacrificed for your sin and the sin of the whole world. Jesus is the One God finds to be guilty in your place. Jesus' body is that sanctuary which the Jews will destroy on the cross, but which will be raised up on the Third Day, so that, in your baptism you also die with Jesus and are raised with Him. And you now live with the assurance that your sin is forgiven.

Yes, my friend, God does not find in you anything to punish and condemn. He finds Jesus in you, and for you. He was punished and condemned in your place. God forgives you. Each one of you is forgiven. And this, because of Jesus, is exactly as it should be. Amen.