

John 2:13-22

We thought we had it rough last Sunday when we lost our power in the middle of the service. But what about that church in Illinois who lost their pastor during worship when a gunman came in and began shooting? A church is a sanctuary. It's always been seen as a place of safety; a place secure from the threats of the world around us. Guns and churches do not belong together. Pastors shouldn't have to wear bullet-proof vests. Ushers shouldn't have to be armed with concealed weapons in cases of emergency. And worshipers should be able to focus upon the words of God and not be worrying about the possibility of a madman interrupting their sacred gathering. But it happened. And I doubt if the families who were gathered at that church in Illinois last Sunday will ever forget the horror that their eyes witnessed.

Centuries before last Sunday's shooting, another "madman" entered into a church and began terrorizing the people there. He didn't have a gun or a knife; he had a whip, and his name was Jesus. Maybe you think it's a little ridiculous to draw a parallel between these two events, but think about this—if they had had television, and radio, and newspapers at that time, what Jesus did at the temple in Jerusalem would have been bigger news than last Sunday's events in Illinois.

In the people's eyes, Jesus was a madman. He didn't just interrupt their "sacred" gathering; in their eyes He was destroying their way of life! He was overturning their economy. He was driving their sacrificial animals out of the temple. He was making a mockery of their religion. I don't know what the authorities will do with last Sunday's killer, but for the "crimes" Jesus committed they put Him to death.

Was He angry? Is that why Jesus did it? Or did He just suddenly snap and go on a rampage? Mild-mannered Jesus. The paintings we see of Him depict Him with a gentle look on His face, holding children in His arms, caring for people, helping the sick. Does anyone have a painting of Christ holding a whip? Do any of you have an image depicting Him tearing up the temple, throwing chairs, overturning tables, with a wild look in His eyes? Is this our Savior? Is this the One we pray to and hold dear to our hearts? Is this who we teach our children to imitate?

"Why did he do it?" Many are asking this question about last Sunday's killer, and we may never know his true motive. But we do know why Jesus went on this "rampage." His disciples figured it out. They recalled the words of the Psalmist: "Zeal for your house will consume me."

Let's do a word study here. "Zeal"...we don't use this word much, if at all. It means to be passionate for something. We use "consume" now and then. It means here to be controlled by, swallowed by, or buried by something. Jesus' passion for His Father's House controlled Him. His zeal swallowed Him up so that He was driven by His passion...buried by it. St. Paul had this same kind of zeal. Before he became a Christian, he was passionate about persecuting Jesus' followers. After his conversion, his zeal was to preach the Gospel.

What do you have zeal for? The House of the Lord? The study of His Word? How about hunting? Shopping? Watching TV? Working? Playing? We don't understand Jesus' zeal

for God's House too well because we don't have it. What happens here in church on Sundays, and Wednesdays in Lent, is not what consumes us. Sadly, we're consumed by trying to pay the bills; by setting aside time for friends and leisure activities. We're passionate about many things, but God's Word isn't one of them. If it was we would have overflowing pews, Bible Study classes, and offering plates.

God's House, for us, may be a place we go to now and then, but for Jesus it was the center of the universe. Not because animals were slaughtered there. Not because it was a busy place in Jerusalem. And not because traders were making good money at the expense of the poor there. Jesus was consumed with zeal for God's House because it's where heaven and earth met; where God came to be with sinners; where God forgave the sins of those who repented and gave them life and salvation.

But the money traders in the temple were making a mockery of that...and that made Jesus angry. "Do what you want to Me; destroy Me; nail Me to a cross; but stop making My Father's House a house of trade!" And they did kill that "madman." They did nail Him to a cross. But on the third day He rose again, and so now every time we gather here in God's House, that "madman" enters this place with us, not to terrorize us, but to give us His body and blood—to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation in His name.

Jesus was a madman to the people in the temple, but to us He is our Savior. He let the madmen of His day arrest Him, not for His crimes, but for ours; for the sins you and I have done. He let them brandish Him a traitor, a rebel. And He let them take Him to the place of execution to die the death we deserve.

God does not change He tells us. Jesus still today has zeal for the House of God. He's consumed by it, and it's because He's consumed by His love for you. God's House is still the place where heaven and earth meet because here God meets us in the person of His Son. Christ is our Mediator, our go-between. And He is in His Word and Sacraments to meet you with the grace and mercy of God. Jesus drove the animals out of the temple because He, not them, is the One who was sacrificed on the cross; and you get, here, not the blood of sheep and pigeons, but the blood of Christ which takes your sins away.

In this Holy Supper heaven meets us here on earth. The angels and archangels are present. The saints in heaven are present. The holy God is present. In Jesus' flesh and blood we are all joined as one. And you're a part of it. Maybe our zeal for the things of God is not what it should be, but God has zeal for you. He is passionate about you—so passionate that He gave Himself up for you on Calvary and He, here, gives Himself to you.

You are not here today with weapons—guns, knives—although that killer last Sunday is no worse than any of us. Hatred is murder. Lust is adultery. Coveting is stealing. You did not come into God's House today with intentions to hurt and harm your neighbor, but you and I did come in here full of our sins. Jesus takes them from you. He is not here to scold you; He is not here to arrest you and convict you for your wrongful deeds. He is here as your place of safety. Jesus is your refuge.

He knows what God's House is for. He drove those money traders, those extortionists out of it in Jerusalem. God's House is for poor sinners like you and me. It's for us who have bad thoughts, and have used bad words, and have done bad things. It's for all who are sorry

for their sins. It's for you who need God's forgiveness. And that forgiveness is yours now. Whatever your zeal in life; whatever your wrongful passions, God forgives you. Even if you are consumed by things not of God, He pardons you for Jesus' sake. And because His zeal is for you, He will keep drawing you here to His House of Mercy. He will keep drawing you into His Word of Grace that your zeal for Him may increase; that your love for His Word may grow; that you may live, daily, consumed by His love and forgiveness for you in Jesus. Amen.