

Introductory

All three synoptics record this incident, and John's account is the appointed text for this Sunday. Luke's account (19:41-48) is appointed for Trinity 10 in TLH. The Luke text talks about things other than the Cleansing. In both LW and in LSB, this text is the reading for Lent 3B in the three-year lectionaries, and the other accounts are not appointed for any time on any Sunday.

Since this incident has been a part of the one-year lectionary, and since it was always taught in Sunday school, you and your hearers are probably familiar with it. Given that we now hear it read in church only every three years, it will not be as familiar to the younger listeners as to the older. The true story is interesting; very good material for writing and preaching a good sermon.

I'm not sure why the lectionary-makers decided to move this incident from an annual lectionary occurrence to one that occurs once every three years, but I suspect that at least some of them would think that what Jesus does here to be unbecoming. It looks like He seeks out conflict and then uses a weapon (whip) to do violence to people who were just doing what they were doing.

We aren't quite sure what to make of this incident. Clearly – so it seems – Jesus is not happy about what is going on here, and just as clearly, He is very passionate about making it go away. Would that Christians these days be more passionate about the House of God and the things that go on in and around it. Just how passionate was He, and just how violent was this episode?

Google Image “Jesus Cleanses the Temple,” and the depictions run the gamut from an angry Jesus using a whip on humans who are cowering from Him, forearms in defensive position, to those that have livestock running away from the whip to a foo foo Jesus just standing there with a whip, whose expression says He doesn't really know how it got there or what to do with it.

The first thing is that Jesus never sinned, so whatever exactly He did there was not sinful. He used a whip, not a sword, and while we have Peter actually using his sword, we have no evidence to indicate that Jesus carried a sword, but neither do we have any reason to think that He did not carry one. The unarmed male is a relatively recent thing. But He did have a whip.

Most of the hearers are probably familiar with the people who are doing business in the Temple. Pilgrims would come to Temple in Jerusalem, some of them from very far away, to offer sacrifices. Sometimes people would bring their own animals, and sometimes it may be found by the priest to have some sort of a blemish that rendered the animal unsatisfactory for sacrifice.

Sometimes such a blemish actually existed, and I don't know any way to know how much collaboration there may have been between the priests and the businessmen who had set up shop.

Some of the pilgrims may have come to town planning to buy an animal for sacrifice when they got there, sparing them the trouble of herding animals all the way from faraway home to here.

The common presumption is that the pilgrims were being gouged, if not outright cheated, but there's no evidence of that, but that doesn't mean that it didn't happen. When you go to the "farmers market," some things offered for sale are from the farm. Some things offered for sale at the "farmers market" are bought at Wal-Mart. I think this is common to every "farmers market."

The argument is that people were compelled to buy one of the animals or have money changed from these men, but maybe it was not that at all. The larger problem was more that the animal for sacrifice was supposed to be from your own, which an animal bought at Temple technically was, but which would have violated the spirit of the law of sacrifice. The largest problem is location.

Textual Notes

13. The second chapter of John's gospel begins with Jesus changing water into wine. That happened at Cana, and then they went to Capernaum, "Καὶ ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ πάσχα τῶν Ἰουδαίων, καὶ ἀνέβη εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα ὁ Ἰησοῦς – and the Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up into Jerusalem." They were going to Jerusalem because the Passover was about to take place.

It may seem odd that John, a Jew, writing to a presumably largely Jewish audience, would have had to say that the Passover was a festival observed by "the Jews." Many non-Jews would also know that the Passover is a Jewish festival, so it would seem redundant to add the genitive "of the Jews" to "the Passover." As a matter of fact, John talks a lot about "the Jews" throughout.

Probably every scholar who has ever done scholarly work on John notes that when John uses the term "the Jew," he is not referring to the entirety of the race, but to those Jews who openly oppose Jesus. What John is telling us here is that Jesus is going to the city of Jerusalem, the place where He will meet people who will oppose Him. He does, and the conflict is immediate.

That opposition from those people in that city stands in stark contrast to the reception that He has just gotten in places like Cana and Capernaum and the welcome that He gets in just about any other place not called Jerusalem. The farther Jesus got away from Jerusalem, the more open was the reception to Him. The closer He gets, the more frequent and intense is the opposition.

14. He went to the Temple because that's where He wanted to go, and when He got there, "εὗρεν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοὺς πωλοῦντας – He found people selling" various animals. The verb is in the active, not the passive voice; Jesus did not just happen on these people doing what they are doing. Likely He already knew where they were, and He went out and found them.

No matter the institution, over time the tendency is towards atrophy or corruption. The Church is no exception to that rule, and I have seen that one every level in the LCMS. What do you do about it? You can ignore it, and live with it, and avoid the inevitable conflict. Or you can confront it, like Jesus does here, and if you're going to do that, you are going to get push back.

The people with the tables are selling “βόας καὶ πρόβατα καὶ περιστερὰς καὶ τοὺς κερματιστὰς καθημένους – oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money changers were sitting there.” Not that they were trying to hide from Jesus or anybody else. Far from it, like anybody who sets up a table at any convention or conference, they *wanted* people to know about their tables.

They wanted people to be able to find them so those people would make use of the services that they were offering. If advertising had been invented – and that did not come until the nineteenth century – they would have done that, and if the Internet had been invented, they would have utilized click bait and had web sites where you could click on “directions” for directions to them.

The commentaries do a good job of explaining what is going on here. Regarding the selling of animals, the OT told people to bring animals from the farm for sacrifice. Over time, people found it easier to buy an animal when they got to Temple than to herd it over distance to their destination. But like most things, the convenience of having an animal on site came at a price.

Animals bought at Temple, the relate, were sold at an elevated price. In addition to that, when pilgrims did bring an animal from home, the priests would find something wrong with that animal, and the sacrificer would be compelled to buy from the men on site. You’re taking *that* animal to Temple. That’s not going to fly. I can put you into this late-model cow for...

Regarding the money, one coin was acceptable for deposit into the alms box, and that coin could be had most easily from the money-changers. When you need Euros, you can use Wells Fargo, or you can do it at the airport and get a lot less bang for your buck. It was all just business, it was a good business, and it was the way things worked. It had no place in the courts of Temple.

Expositors talks about the effect of this business,

This Temple tyranny and monopoly and these exorbitant charges naturally tended to make the Temple worship hateful to the people; and besides, the old charm of sacrifice, the free offering by a penitent of what he knew and cherished, the animal that he valued because he had watched it from its birth and had tested its value in the farm work—all this was abolished by this “convenient” abuse.

You can talk about the nuts and bolts of what’s going on here, and that’s okay, but to help people better understand in terms familiar to them, talk about it being like things they know about. You go to a swap meet or flea market, a Pastors Conference or district or synodical convention, the Symposium or the boat, camper, or car show and there are tables, and everybody is selling.

Not picture that scene along the sidewalk outside or even in the narthex on Sunday morning.

15. On a very visceral level, I love it that, before He encountered these entrepreneurs, Jesus made Himself a whip. Why does a person make a whip? Douglas’s mother in Pittsburg used to talk about how, when he was growing up, and if he had done something wrong, his mother would send him out into the back yard to get a switch off of the peach tree, and Douglas would go.

Jesus makes a whip because He's fixin' to use it. But before we get too far into talk of *Pale Rider*, let's take a closer look at what He does with the whip; “καὶ ποιήσας φραγέλλιον ἐκ σχοινίων πάντα ἐξέβαλεν ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ τὰ τε πρόβατα καὶ τοὺς βόας – and having made a whip of cords, He drove from Temple all the and the oxen,” but notably He did not drive out humans.

Not all whips are the same, and the item that Jesus held in His hand is a “φραγέλλιον – a whip” and it was a thing that was used when you wanted to inflict serious physical damage on the person being whipped. It was the one whose use was limited by Roman and Jewish law to forty lashes because more than that would probably kill you, whose use often proved fatal nonetheless.

This is the only occurrence of that noun in the NT, but the verbal cognate, φραγελλόω, occurs several times in the NT, most notably in MT 27:26 and in MK15:15, in connection with what was done to Jesus by Pilate's soldiers. Vine describes that sort of a beating,

the person was stripped and tied in a bending posture to a pillar or stretched on a frame. The scourge was made of leathern thongs, weighted with sharp pieces of bone or lead, which tore the flesh of both the back and the breast.”

That's the use to which the φραγέλλιον was usually put. But not here. The verb used to describe what He did with the whip is “ἐκβάλλω – to cast out,” a word used, in the eighty-one times we see it in the NT, to describe a whole range of kinds of casting out, all the way from the farmer sending workers into the fields (MT 9:38), to the casting out of demons (MT 10:8 et al).

Here, He is using the whip to drive the animals out of the Temple. What He is doing may not make PETA happy, but there are really no nice ways to make animals move if they don't want to move. That concept is familiar to people who deal with livestock, but you might have to explain it to city folk. Would it have sounded better if Jesus had used a cattle prod instead of a whip?

Clearly the whip was used to drive out the sheep and the oxen, not the people who owned them. Google Images reveal that many artists think that Jesus used the whip on people, but He didn't. The translations are sort of all over the place in communicating to the reader exactly who and what are being “cast out” by the Guy with the whip. The original is crystal clear on that point.

Now He goes after the money-changers; “τῶν κολλυβιστῶν ἐξέχεεν τὰ κέρματα καὶ τὰς τραπέζας ἀνέτρεψεν – the coins of them he poured out, and the tables he overthrew.” The coins seem to have been in containers and pouring their contents onto the floor wasn't enough; he turned their tables over. But He's not quite done. There's still the matter of the birds.

16. He did not drive the doves, or pour them out, but He said to those who were “πωλοῦσιν Ἄρατε ταῦτα ἐντεῦθεν – selling, take these things away.” To note what is perhaps the obvious; the owners of the animals that had been chased off by Jesus could go and fetch their property and were out nothing, and the owners of the coins could pick up their coins and were out nothing.

But if Jesus had let the birds out of the cages they were presumably in, their owner may have suffered financial loss when their birds flew the coop. So, He just tells them to get. His objective

was to chase them out of the Temple, not to cause them to suffer financial loss. Had He done that, He would have been breaking the law, and that would have been a sin. Jesus never sinned.

The portrayals of an out-of-control Jesus going ape shirt on these people are wrong, and ought to be saved for the Preacher in *Pale Rider*. This was, in fact, a very controlled, calculated, well-planned cleansing of the Temple and no personal property was lost or damaged. At this point, you can quote the Seventh Commandment from the OT reading and talk about personal property.

I find myself more and more speaking against Socialism, like Pastors used to. The Seventh, Ninth, and Tenth Commandments all pre-suppose the existence of personal property. When Pastors used to speak against Socialism, they – and the Pope – pointed out that the Socialist government is forcibly taking things God has given to you and giving them to other people.

They even called it “stealing,” and that money is often given to people who don’t want to work. It’s one thing to levy taxes for the common national defense, to pay the bills that come with government, to pay tax on things I use – before the introduction of the Income Tax, most of the federal income was from taxes on whiskey – or even to pay for roads and other public works.

He then proceeds to explain to them the reason for the cleansing like He did, “μὴ ποιεῖτε τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Πατρὸς μου οἶκον ἐμπορίου – stop making the house of My Father into a house of business.” The last word in the sentence is a hapax in the NT, the farmers market is very old, and the word’s usage in the secular literature of the day is for an old-fashioned marketplace.

The problem, Jesus seems to think – He talks about “My Father’s House,” is location, location, location. I’m not sure there would have been a problem with the business these people were doing if they had been doing it somewhere else. It’s the difference between CPH Publishing setting up shop at a Pastors Conference and setting up shop in the narthex on Sunday morning.

17. Jesus means business, and when the disciples saw what He had done, it caused them to remember an OT verse, “Ὁ ζῆλος τοῦ οἴκου σου καταφάγεται με – the zeal of your house will consume me.” Not often do we find the disciples of Jesus spouting Scripture. Psalm 69:9, from a Psalm of David, is the passage that comes to their minds as they watch Jesus cleansing Temple.

Psalm 69 is very messianic. I would hesitate to say that the disciples at this point have enough discernment to confess Jesus to be the Messiah, except that at least some of them has already done just that (1:41). Whether or not they are here – by quoting that verse – confessing Jesus to be the Christ, they are taking note of the passion that Jesus has for Temple and the things of it.

Psalm 69 is a good read. David is under attack by his enemies, and he prays for God to deliver him from them and even to destroy them. We call asking God to destroy our enemies an “imprecatory” prayer, and not everybody is down with that. The Hebrew word “אָכַל - consume” occurs eight hundred ten times in the OT, first when Eve eats the fruit, and that’s what it means.

18. Some of the people who heard what the disciples said were pretty sure that they were declaring Jesus to be the Messiah. John tells us that, right after the disciples said what they said,

“ἀπεκρίθησαν οὖν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι – The Jews therefore answered.” The first word in the sentence is the verb ἀποκρίνομαι, a word meaning a direct response to something that has just been said.

The second word is οὖν, a conjunction that indicates that what is about to follow happens because of what has just happened. In this instance, it is the declaration of the disciples, - specifically their quoting of the messianic Psalm 69 verse – that causes “the Jews” to respond to that verse by asking for a sign; evidence or proof to show them that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

A “σημεῖον – sign” is a miraculous, supernatural act. I can’t do signs, but Jesus can do signs. Sometimes OT people did signs. The Apostles could do signs, and so could the few upon whom The Twelve laid hands, but those few could *not* pass that ability on to others. Today, we observe signs like Baptism and the Sacrament of the Altar, and we generally don’t think twice about it.

The question is directed pointedly and specifically at “αὐτῷ Τί σημεῖον δεικνύεις ἡμῖν, ὅτι ταῦτα ποιεῖς – Him, what signs do you show, that these things you do?” The verb is in the present indicative, and “you” is in the singular number. The question is put in such a way as to make it seem as if these people think that Jesus has to answer to them, because that’s what they thought.

The question seems to imply that if Jesus can do signs, then He would show Himself to be Messiah, and if He is Messiah, then its okay with them that He is doing “these things,” i.e. cleansing the Temple. But if He is not Messiah, and He’s just some guy from Nazareth here for Passover, then of course He had no more business cleansing Temple than did anybody else.

His response to their response must have struck them as rather odd; “Λύσατε τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον, καὶ ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις ἐγερῶ αὐτόν – destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The verb form is an aorist active imperative second person plural form of the verb “λύω.” Jesus is commanding, or inviting them to destroy “this Temple,” telling them that He will raise it up.

The Temple was a large building, and if it were destroyed it would take much longer than three days to resurrect it. The bitter experience of having lost Solomon’s Temple for good, then having it replaced only after a period of several decades by an inferior building, had taught these people that Temple is not easy to come by, and to build one was expensive and time-consuming.

20. We build much more quickly than the ancients. Few of the grand medieval churches were built in a few years, and some of them were built over periods of as much as hundreds of years. Even in the twentieth century, churches like the National Cathedral in D.C. and the Cathedral Basilica of St. Louis, somewhere in Missouri, took most of that century to complete.

The Romans once – just to show the Gauls that they could – built a bridge across the Rhine, marched across it, fought with the Gauls, marched back, and dismantled the bridge, all in a few days. But this was not a bridge, it was a Temple, and the builders were not Roman, and a forty-six year building project like this would not have been unusual in that time and place.

The common thinking is that Herod, a half-Jew, half-Edomite, was never fully accepted by his subjects, and that he undertook projects like the Temple rebuild mostly because he wanted to be

liked by his subjects. He was not religious. By the end of the life of Jesus those renovations had been completed, and Ezra's (Second) Temple had been made much more elaborate and grand.

I have called it a "rebuild," and the renovations of Herod were so drastic that this building is often referred to as the Third Temple. How many walls have to be torn down and put up, and how much space has to be added on, and how much new ornamentation has to be added to make what had been a renovation into a new building? But Jesus wasn't speaking of *that* Temple,

The very purpose and meaning of that building had even by then become superfluous and would soon be non-existent, and in forty short years the building itself would be destroyed, never to return. Well, Fundamentalist Christians and Fundamentalist Jews may somehow some day manage to bring it back, but God doesn't need it and neither do Christians. Read Hebrews.

21. But He's not talking about a building, "ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔλεγεν περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ – but He spoke of the temple of His body." Jesus is calling His shot, but there's a lot more going on here than just that. He reveals an understanding of self, that He in His person is indeed Temple. If you want to locate God, no longer look in Temple, but now you should look at Jesus.

He knows that He's going to be "destroyed" or "killed" (it's the same word) by these very people and that He will rise up after three days. In another place, He references Jonah and says that He will be in the grave for as many days as Jonah was in the belly of the whale; three days. Since He has ascended, you should look for Him in, with, and under the host and cup in the Sacrament.

22. When Jesus was raised from the dead, "ἐμνήσθησαν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι τοῦτο ἔλεγεν – His disciples remembered that He said this," how He had here predicted the event. John was one of those disciples. Remembering these words post-resurrection, John tells us that they "ἐπίστευσαν τῇ γραφῇ καὶ τῷ λόγῳ ὃν εἶπεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς – they believed the Scripture and the word Jesus said."

The first word, "Scriptures" is the OT, and the second word, "word," is the thing that Jesus has just said about His resurrection. Until Jesus actually rose from the dead, there was a certain amount of uncertainty among the disciples. After the event, when they had seen the living Jesus in the flesh, they believed, and eventually even made it out of that locked down room.

It was not until Pentecost and their being filled with the Holy Spirit that it came into tight. The OT talks about resurrection, and actual resurrection takes place – the son of the Widow of Nain, for example. Jesus talks about resurrection and actually will raise Lazarus from the dead, but until it actually happens, even for believers will be the question whether it's going to happen.

23. John tells us that "πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ – many believed in His name, seeing His miracles that He did – θεωροῦντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει." Up to this point, in John, the only miracle recorded is Changing Water into Wine. This sentence would seem to indicate that He has done more miracles than that. Not everything that Jesus did is written down.

When the writer tells us that people believed in Jesus, he uses the common word, commonly translated, "belief, faith, trust" or one of their cognates, the faith Christians have in Jesus to be

their savior. Paul speaks of such faith to the Ephesians (2:8), “saved through faith, and this is not your own doing. It is a gift of God.” Salvation, and the faith to procure it, are a gift from God.

Ellicott speaks of the kind of faith that comes from beholding miracles,

The original words imply that their faith was dependent upon the signs which they gazed upon, without entering into their deeper meaning. It was the impulsive response of the moment, not based upon a previous preparation, nor resulting in a present deep conviction. It came far short of the faith of the disciples, who passed from a true knowledge of Moses and the Prophets to a true knowledge of Christ without a sign; but it came far above the disbelief of scribes and Pharisees, who after a sign rejected Him. It was not the prepared good ground bringing forth abundantly; but neither was it the hardened wayside which did not receive the seed at all.

24. For His part, “Ἰησοῦς οὐκ ἐπίστευεν αὐτὸν αὐτοῖς – Jesus did not entrust Himself to them.” With regard to those who believed in Him because of the miracles He did, we would say that Jesus did not count on them for anything. The reason given for His lack of trust is “διὰ τὸ αὐτὸν γινώσκειν πάντα – because of His to know all,” because He well knew that people are people.

The *He Gets Us* campaign has gotten a lot of flak from a lot of quarters, including Christians, and including me. A story did come across my screen today about how one of the commercials served as a conversation starter for a Christian to talk to an unbeliever about our religion. Indeed, Jesus does understand about man, whom He created. It can be said that He does get us.

The Omniscient knows in particular how fair weather can be these kinds of friends, and we often see that in the NT and in our current context. Pastors know how quickly people can turn on you, and probably others see the same things happening in their vocations. I don’t think we know hard numbers or percentages, but it is clear that sometimes people follow Jesus, until they don’t.

After a time, for whatever reason, I can’t make people come to church, and they stop. They were happy to have Him as their Bread King, but when the bread ran out, they ran off. Later on in John, when He speaks of Self as the Bread of Life, many who had been following, stopped (6:66), and by the time He got to the cross, The Church has shrunk to a precious – a hundred?

Pulpit Commentary says,

This remarkable expression corresponds with many actions and methods of Jesus. When he was offered the homage of devils, he forbade them to speak. When those who had been simply healed of bodily disease began garrulously to proclaim his praises, he silenced them. He had no faith in their faith, and consequently did not open to them more of his nature; still less did he assume, as they would have liked him to do, an immediate and outward Messiahship of political revolt.

25. To say “ἐγίνωσκεν τί ἦν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ – He knew what was in a man” is not a compliment to mankind, but it is instead a ringing indictment of fallen human nature. I just said, and have

said, and John says it towards the end of this book; not everything Jesus did was written down, but John does take a verse or two to tell us that Jesus – yes, He created us – knows all about us.

Law/Gospel

Tables Turned/Tables Set Up – These men had made religion into a business, and sadly we see a lot of that these days. Sinful man would rather make money off of God than worship Him, although I see that a lot more in TV preachers than in the average Lutheran. Others before me have noted that Jesus turned over the tables of these people and that He then set up a new table, the Sacrament of the Altar.

Greed/Satisfaction – If not greed, then at least an untoward desire for money caused these men to do what they did. Greed, or at least an untoward desire for money causes us to do things that we should not. The God who has provided for our eternal welfare also satisfies our every need here.

Good Friday/Easter Sunday – Jesus speaks of His own death, and He speaks of His own resurrection.

During the Lenten Season, these two events should be in a very prominent position in our preaching. Because of our sin, there is Good Friday and we all must face the eternal Good Friday of hell, but because of Easter Sunday we look forward to an eternal resurrected life in heaven with Jesus.

Sermon Titles

Tables Turned

Why Does Jesus Have a Whip?

It's Just Business

Hymns

Sing Lenten hymns during the Lenten Season

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, IA

Resources

ACC – Manlio Simonetti, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* (Mark). Intersity Press, 2002

BAG – Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, University of Chicago Press, 1979

BCLY – William Barclay, *The Gospel of Mark*. The Westminster Press, 1975

FGG – James W. Voelz, *Fundamental Greek Grammar*. Concordia Publishing House, 1993

MGM – W.F. Moulton, A.S. Geden, H.K. Moulton, *A Concordance to the Greek Testament*. T & T Clark LTD., 1978

MM – James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982

ODCC – F.L. Cross, Editor, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Oxford University Press, 1978

RNK – Fritz Rienecker, *A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Zondervan, 1976

RSV – Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Zondervan Publishing House, 1965

UBD – Merrill F. Unger, *Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody Press, 1977.

WP – A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Baker, 1930

VINE – W.E.Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *An Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984

WIK – www.wikipedia.com

BIB – www.biblos.com

GBO – www.greekbible.com

Digital Classics Library - www.perseus.tufts.edu

Internet Classics Library – www.classics.mit.edu

Christian Classics Ethereal Library - www.ccel.org

Project Wittenberg - www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/wittenberg-home.html

