

Third Sunday in Lent
John 2:13-22
Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear

St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA
March 15, 2009

A Word to the Wise

The calendar indicates on Friday March 20 spring officially arrives. Around us there are signs that spring is right around the corner. Last weekend we turned our clocks ahead. Robins have been busy gathering for their new nests. Crocus' are beginning to emerge from the cold ground. Pot holes are popping up in the roads. Shades of green are appearing on the lawns. Perhaps you have gotten the lawn mower serviced or started to rake the branches and leaves that still remain in the yard or even started to sweep the gravel along the curb. Maybe you started the inside list of spring house cleaning chores. Put away the sweaters, wash the windows and make sure the screens are repaired. Clean out the garage or basement. Open the window on a sunny day to let in some fresh air. Spring house cleaning gives a new fresh appearance around the house, both inside and out. Getting a fresh start seems to make life easier and simpler, at least for the time being. Spring cleaning reveals things once covered by snow or repairs that need fixed after a cold winter.

Like preparing for spring, Jesus and other devout Jews were getting ready to celebrate Passover. He traveled from Capernaum to Jerusalem. Like you when you start cleaning up for spring, Jesus had no idea what he would find in Jerusalem. Because he traveled a great distance, sacrificial animals were bought at the temple. Not only did a pious Jew have to buy an animal for sacrifice, they needed to pay the temple tax. There were people arriving in Jerusalem that had coins from their homeland. The money changers at the temple converted money to the temple shekel, purchase a sacrificial animal and pay the tax. We know from other Bible stories money changers are notorious for charging a variety of fees.

Jesus arrives and becomes angry immediately at what he sees going on in the temple. The Jesus we think of as passive, kind, compassionate, suddenly becomes outraged. You can see the look on his face when he sees the money changes taking advantage of those traveling from distant lands. Cheating them out a fair value for their coins, overcharging for the animals, letting the animals and people run free. The scene that confronts Jesus as he goes to the temple is representative of the whole corruption of Israel's

religious life. His conflict is with a system and with religious officials who are by their actions, breaking every one of the first two commandments! Remember what they are? I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods; do not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

In our daily lives, we like Jesus become angry with what we see around us. Our world is filled with unfair activities, cheating goes on around us all the time, we set up opportunities for someone to fail rather than be lifted up, we question someone else when they don't conform to our particular thinking. Yet, we lift up that God created each of us in God's image and gifted us with unique gifts. We might look at someone and wonder why they dress the way they do, or indulge themselves in addictive behavior, or act out in inappropriate ways, or talk down to someone. In other ways, we overlook the creative gifts of those around us. We struggle to accept others for who they are. It is easier to put them into our own images and thoughts.

When Jesus is asked to defend his actions, he refuses to interpret or justify his actions. Instead he says, 'destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' This temple was still a work in progress for the past forty-six years. In comes this simple man from Galilee and says destroy it. AND I will rebuild it in three days. Jesus is not talking about the bricks and mortar that make the building. He is referring to the people of God, the body of Christ. You and I, are the temple of God. He points them to the cross; the place where Jesus is crucified. It is in the cross we find our relationship with God, through Jesus. Church is more than a place for fellowship, or a place to feel smug about who we are. It is about the relationship we have with God through Jesus Christ. Church is the heart of those who gather in God's name, who know Jesus is in their lives and who are free to share with each other.

In our reading of *The Shack* this week we encountered Sarayu, the spirit, taking Mack, the main character in the story, to a beautiful garden. In this garden there are plants, flowers and trees growing everywhere. They are not in straight perfect rows, like Mack would expect. Rather they are free to grow wherever they want. Sarayu asks Mack to help her clear some of the growth so they can plant other plants in their place. They begin to dig out the seemingly tough plants with shovels, trimming off long branches of others, and putting them on a pile to be burned later. After a few hours, Sarayu asks Mack if he feels better. Of course his arms are aching, but over

all he says yes. Sarayu like Jesus in the temple helped Mack clear himself of the overgrown stuff in his life; to help him see Jesus in his heart.

This is what Jesus does with us. He comes into our hearts and helps us clear out the rubbish thoughts and actions. The stuff that gets in the way of knowing God and giving God's love to others. We are the temple of God in the world, in every nation among the people of the world. The temple is no longer a building, or even a geographical place. People are not going to come to God by having to come to a physical place. We are the temple of God scattered throughout the world. In this body we look to the world in compassion and mercy, extending the blessings of God now to everyone.

Paul writes to the young Corinthian church rooted in Christ and where the Good News is threatened by divisions. There was a faction of the Corinthian church devoted to Greek wisdom and logic as tools in the search for truth, an emphasis on reasoning skills. Paul counters that true wisdom and power reside in the cross of Jesus Christ. The world in its wisdom totally missed true knowledge of God. Christianity is not a logically or rationally discerned truth, but a revealed truth through faith. On the other end of the discerning God spectrum in the Corinthian church was the group of Jews in the church who looked for miraculous signs for divine truth. It was the "What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you?" The only thing that can unite the church is the centrality of God's action in Christ and not the miraculous signs one group wants to see or the rationally discerned truth the other wants. Faith and the unity of the community rest in Christ and his work of salvation and not in the ability of humankind.

When we think we know the power of God, God comes to us and reminds us that it is not in our wisdom we find our salvation. Christ is the power and wisdom of God. During this Lenten season, God gives us the gift of his Son on the cross. Look at your heart, and do some housecleaning. Jesus is the wise word for us. Where is Jesus in your life? When God as the body of Christ is central, the community of faith can function as the people of God.