

The third Sunday of Lent. The scripture text is taken John 2:13-22

When Mary and Martha's brother, Lazarus was sick, they sent word to Jesus asking Him to come and heal Lazarus. But the scripture tells us, that when He heard these words, that He stayed where He was for two more days.

When He arrived, He learned that Lazarus had already been dead for 4 days. When Jesus heard those words, we find the shortest verse in all the Bible: "Jesus wept".

Jesus' friend was gone and it brought him to tears. But this is a different emotion than what we see here. There is only one way to describe His passion on this particular day, Jesus was angry, just flat out angry.

All of us have been there before. Something stirs us up, our emotions flare up and suddenly our anger spews out.

Anger is just one of those emotions that we are born with and you can't get rid of it. It will always be there.

But we need to get hold of an important truth here. Being angry is not a sin. It is what we do with our anger, that really matters.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus was without sin. He was perfect. Yet we see Him in this story as He takes several leather cords and makes a "whip" of those cords, and then goes on a rampage, driving the money changers out of the Temple area, including their animals.

Jesus then scatters the coins of the money changers and then flips over their tables. Jesus' passion took over for a simple reason.

The Temple was being used for the wrong purpose. This was not so much about the buying and the selling that was taking place, it was about how it was being done.

It was the time of the Passover, which meant that the Jews, who were faithful, headed to Jerusalem to celebrate.

So Jesus went, but when He got there, things were not as they should be. You will remember that in the Old Testament, God required the Jews to celebrate the Passover as a way to remind them, how God had delivered them out of Egypt.

You will remember that in the days of Moses God sent a series of plagues to convince Pharaoh and to let the children of Israel go.

But Pharaoh was stubborn. God had sent 9 plagues and still no response. Locusts, a plague where the Nile River was turned to blood, but Pharaoh still would not listen.

So now, God sent the final plague, a 10th one. God sent a messenger to kill the firstborn son of each family in Egypt, but as God always does, He also offered a way out for them.

To preserve the life of their first born they would need to kill a sacrificial lamb and apply the blood of the lamb to door post.

When the messenger would see the blood, then He (the angel of death) would pass over the house and the first born child would be spared.

Pharaoh was finally convinced, so He released the people. On that day, God told the Israelites that they must remember what He had done for them, and they were to remember it in this way, they were to sacrifice an innocent lamb and then eat this meal, along with bitter herbs. (This is called the Seder Meal)

They were also told, that they must go Jerusalem to do this. So this is why Jesus and His disciples were there in Jerusalem.

I want you to imagine with me if you will, what they saw when they got there. The Jews had greatly multiplied by this time, so hundreds of thousands of Jews from all over the “known-world” of Jesus’ day would have flooded into the city.

Like a national convention, or like the Olympic games, coming to town. And all of that attention and the size of the crowd meant one thing; “money”.

If you think about it, the economic impact was huge. The merchants would clearly stand to make a lot of money. Like they say in the real estate business: “location, location, location”. So the merchants set up shop in the Temple area.

The merchants would not have been inside of the Temple, where the worshippers actually gathered, but they would be set up in the court-yard of Temple, very close the actual entrance of the Temple.

When Jesus arrived at the Temple, He saw that the Temple court-yard had been basically been turned into a giant market-place, He was furious.

But worse than that, was what they were selling animals for the sacrifices and they were getting far more for them, than what they should. (I think the term we would use today is “price gouging”.)

In other words, the merchants were ripping people off. Here is how these merchants were doing it. Most of the people who came to Jerusalem for the Passover had traveled a very long way.

Traveling in Jesus’ day was difficult, it’s not like today, where you could just jump into a motor vehicle, turn on the GPS and hit the road. It didn’t work like that.

People had to travel in numbers for safety, travel was on foot, the roads were not like they are today, and trying to travel with animals to offer as a sacrifice, made it very difficult.

For the festival of Passover, everyone was required to bring or purchase a lamb. So it would be a burden to bring that animal on such a long journey for a sacrifice in the Temple.

Even if you decided to bring your own animal for the sacrifice, the animal had to be perfect with no spot or blemish.

And you were not the one to decide whether or not, your animal was perfect for the sacrifice. The priest made that decision. Here was the problem, if the priest decided that your animal, “was not sacrifice ready so to speak,” then you were just out of luck, too bad, so sad! Now go buy one.

So of course, there was a monopoly going on here. There was a “cartel” so to speak, that sold cattle, lambs, and doves, so the traveler really didn’t have much choice if his or her animal was good to go for a sacrifice.

These merchants, these people, were taking advantage of the traveling public, who was coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of the Passover. (It is like the vendors in any airport, they always

charge more, because they know, you don't have a choice, it's not like you can just go across the road to purchase whatever, you get the idea).

These people who had the monopoly over the sale of these animals were definitely taking advantage of those who came to Jerusalem. You know these people were charging more than they should have.

Then, in walks Jesus. It is here, that we get a different picture of this man named Jesus. Now this, was not the picture in our minds, of Jesus.

If really you think about it, most people, picture in their minds, a Jesus who is meek and mild, a Jesus who is soft and gentle, who is just a happy hippie, who never gets upset or angry.

Folks, we need to remember that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. His blood is as red as yours and mine. Jesus was and is, just like you and I, right down to His feelings, right down to His emotions, but without sin.

Jesus got angry at what He saw. Remember Jesus was and is human. In our gospel narrative for today, Jesus makes a whip out of leather cords, and storms into the Temple area, and drives out the money-changers, flips over their tables, spilling coins all over the Temple floor, Jesus then drives the animals out of the Temple area, and says in a loud voice, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's House a marketplace!" (verse 16)

So Jesus cleans house with a vengeance. It is in fact, painful for those conducting business, but God's House of prayer had become a commercial bazar. Those who were making money off of the travelers didn't care, but Jesus did.

Does this sound like the Jesus we think that is gentle meek and mild, who never gets angry, who is that happy hippie? I don't think so!

And of course the Jews (that would be the religious leaders) got all bent out shape over Jesus' action that day in the Temple area.

But the religious leaders had failed to see what was really going on here. They had taken what God had given them, the holy and sacred space for hearing and learning about God, and had turned it into a place of business, instead of a place set aside for drawing closer to God.

Ok, so what does all of this mean for us? Well, as I mention a few moments ago, anger is a part of who we are. It's in our DNA, and you can't take a pill to rid of it.

I think what is important here, is that Jesus gives an example of how to use our anger in a constructive way, not a destructive way.

According to John's Gospel, when Jesus went in to the Temple area, it was "game-on" folks. But here is the difference: Anger is not a sin, how we use it, or misuse it is.

Jesus anger was a righteous anger. Jesus did what He did out of love for His Father's House, because He was angry at what had become of His Father's House. His anger was righteous.

Now for us, usually when we become angry, we are ready to choke the life out of someone, and try to figure out how to get away with it. (That is our sinful self)

I believe that a lot of our anger is just us, feeling mad. You know, mad at the world for this, or mad at the world for that.

I believe, that the challenge for us in our daily living, as disciples of Christ, is “How do you and I use our anger constructively for the sake of the gospel, rather than using destructively.

We need to remember that God is a righteous God and does not tolerate evil and injustice. God’s Word is a word of judgment as well as grace.

Remember God loves you, and He loves you and He loves you, that is grace. God focused His judgement on His Son, instead of you and I, as Christ Jesus died upon that cross, to take away your sins, my sins and the sins of the world.

And after Christ Jesus died upon that cross, God raised Him from the dead, so that through the resurrection of Christ Jesus, you and I and all those who profess their faith in Christ, we have been given the promise of eternal life.

OK, so when we get angry, how do we use this anger in a righteous way?

We use this anger, by following Christ’s example, hate the sin, love the sinner.

We use this anger by speaking out against injustice, exploitation, and oppression.

We use this anger by taking a stand against what is wrong.

We use this anger by working for the betterment of others.

We use this anger by being an advocate for those who have no voice, the young, the poor, the orphan and the widow, in other words, the powerless.

We use this anger by doing what is right and not worrying about what the world thinks.

WE use this anger by putting forth your time, your efforts, your talents, and your resources, to make a difference in the life of another human-being.

That’s how we use our anger in a righteous way, following Christ’s example. Amen.

Let us pray:

Loving God in mercy for our broken and fallen world, and You sent your only Son into this world to save us from the power of sin and death. O’God, We thank you that you know what it is like to human. Your Son, Christ Jesus, experience anger, but did not sin. Help us we pray, that when we experience anger, help us to follow Christ’s example, so as to turn that anger around and to use constructively, not destructively. Help us to put forth all of our efforts in service to You, to your Church and to one another. All these things, we humbly pray in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.