

Lent 3B, 2009

Text: John 2:13-25

Title: Jesus Cleans House

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Today Jesus cleans house. It's Passover time, Passover comes in the spring, and so Jesus does a bit of spring cleaning.

Now cleaning isn't too bad if you keep up with things. If you do a little bit every day or least on the weekends, you can keep things under control.

But every once in awhile things get a little out of control. You get busy. You're doing major projects or remodeling around the house. You've been sick for bit. Or you just stop caring for awhile. And all of a sudden the house is a disaster. It's cluttered, it's dirty, dishes and laundry are piling up. You need to roll up your sleeves, take the whole day and get things back under control.

The worst is when you have to clean out everything. When it's time to move. When you move someone into a nursing home. When someone dies and you have to go through everything. Things have a way of piling up over a life-time. And when you have to clean everything out of a house, it's a major undertaking.

Cleaning is something that you have to keep up with, otherwise things can easily get out of control.

So spring is a time to do some cleaning, and today Jesus cleans out His Father's house.

And He really gets into it. Jesus rolls up His sleeves and gets to work. He takes a whip and starts driving animals out of the temple, He overturns tables, sending coins rolling everywhere.

Can you imagine what this seen must have been like?

Can you hear the sounds of the cows and the sheep? Can you see the doves flying crazily all over the place? Can you hear the shouts of protest? Hey, what do you think you're doing? Get back here! Those are mine! Can you hear the coins clattering on the ground? Can you see everyone crawling on the ground to gather up the loose change?

Can you see Jesus? Can you see Him tense up with rage? Can you see the anger flashing in His eyes? Can you see the veins bulging from His neck? Can you see the strong, carpenter's arms flipping over tables? Can you hear the crack of the whip?

It must have been quite a sight.

The temple in Jesus' day was an impressive structure. It was still under construction, but that construction had been going on for 46 years now. The entire building was a gleaming white. It was built from polished marble and alabaster. The beams and roof were cedar from Lebanon. The temple gates were overlaid with gold, and gold decorations covered the walls.

At Passover time thousands of pilgrims from every corner of the empire came to Jerusalem to the temple. People traveled from Spain and Italy, Africa and Asia, Greece, Arabia, and everywhere in-between. They came to celebrate the deliverance of their people, when the Lord had brought them out of Egypt. They remembered the night of that last plague when they had painted their doorframes red with the blood of the lamb, and the angel of death passed them by.

Now when you came to the temple, it was a good time to present an offering to the Lord. And it would have been a pain to bring a cow or a sheep or some pigeons along with you on such a long journey. And if you did bring your own animal with you to the temple, there was always a chance that it wouldn't be good enough to offer to the Lord.

And so, for the sake of convenience, there were animals for sale right there in the outer courts of the temple. It was much easier just to buy one of the animals for sale there. Sure, you had to pay a little extra, but the convenience factor more than made up for it.

But to pay for the animal you had to have the right currency. They didn't accept Euros or Pesos or Rubles or Yen. You had to change your money over. If you've ever traveled abroad, you know what this is like. You have to change your money over to the local currency. And there's always a slight fee for the service. (You have to make money to stay in business, right?)

But tourists are inevitably gullible. It's hard to know the going rate for a cow in Jerusalem when you're from Spain. And you wouldn't expect to get cheated at church. But these vendors and money changers were taking advantage of the pilgrims. They knew they were desperate, they knew had to pay the asking price. And a little price gouging was not unusual.

So Jesus calls them out. He calls them thieves, for they are the worst sort of criminal. They are taking advantage of folks who have come to worship the Lord.

What had started out as a useful service for out of town guests had quickly turned into a corrupt business. What was worse was that much of this was overseen by the high priests. They were in charge of all the business that happened at the temple. They stood to benefit monetarily from the fleecing of their flock.

Jesus' response is understandable. What had been a place to offer praise to God and receive His blessing had become another marketplace. He cleans up the place. The dirt and grime of greed had been building up for years, and so drastic cleaning is required. And Jesus doesn't hold back. Everybody out.

Lent is time for spring cleaning for us, too. Lent is a time for the Lord to clean up our lives as well.

And Jesus does that here with us as He makes our bodies His temple.

Our Old Testament reading, the ten words from Sinai show us how filthy our lives have become. These words drive a whip through our hearts and overturn tables within us.

“I’m the God who saved you, so don’t worship anyone else,” says the Lord. And yet the Lord is not the most important thing in your life. He’s usually just an afterthought when you’re in trouble or need something.

“Use my name well” says the Lord. And yet you neglect the Lord’s name when you fail to pray, praise, and give thanks.

“Remember the Holy Day” says the Lord. And yet you neglect the Lord’s Day. You come grudgingly or out of habit. You come because you have to, not because you want to. When the service is ended you hurry off or find other things to do, instead of gladly learning more about God’s Word in Bible Class.

“Honor your parents and those in authority” says the Lord. And yet you make yourself the final authority on all things.

“Don’t kill” says the Lord. And yet you say and think and do harmful things to those around you.

“Don’t commit adultery” says the Lord. And yet you are tempted by lustful thoughts and actions rather than loving and honoring your spouse.

“Don’t steal” says the Lord. And yet you hoard possessions, always wanting more.

“Don’t lie” says the Lord. And yet you assume the worst of people, tell lies and spread gossip rather than speaking well of your neighbors.

“Don’t covet” says the Lord. And yet you continually want and desire more stuff than you have.

These words were spoken for your good, that you might live in a clean, well kept home. And yet when you hear these words, you realize how cluttered and filthy your home has become. You are in need of serious cleaning.

And that’s why we’re here every week. To confess our dirtiness and our laziness in keeping our lives clean, and for the Lord to do a clean sweep of our lives. To overturn our tables of greed, and chase out all that gets in the way and distracts us.

Create in me a clean heart, O God! Is our constant prayer.

Not only does Jesus clean out the old house, but He replaces it with a new house. He does a complete tear-down.

When the Jews ask for a sign, Jesus says, “Tear down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” With these words, Jesus makes His body the new temple.

The old temple had served its purpose. And Jesus comes to replace it with something better. His body is the new temple, the place where God dwells on earth.

There is no more need to make pilgrimages to Jerusalem. There is no more need to go to the temple and buy doves or sheep or cows. There is no more need for any of these things, because Jesus has come.

He is here now, with His body, given for you in the Lord’s Supper. This is the same body that cleaned out the temple that day. This is the same body that drove cattle and overturned tables. This is the same body that was destroyed and rose again in three days.

Jesus’ body is here. This is His new temple. Pure, clean, and holy.

There’s no way for you to keep your house clean on your own. The job is too much for you. The dirty dishes and the laundry pile up too quickly. Your sin gets away from you and out of control.

But Jesus is here now to join you to His body. When you receive His body, you become part of His body, the clean, pure, holy body of Christ, the church, the new temple.

So don’t worry. You don’t need to do any cleaning today. The Jesus does all the work, and it’s free, here for you.