

Lent 3B, 2012

Text: John 2:13-22

Title: Keep it Holy

+ INI +

For the past few weeks we have seen the devil at work. First He was in the wilderness, tempting Jesus to turn His back on God and do for Himself. Then He was in the mouth of Peter, trying to lead Jesus away from the cross to a more comfortable life. Today He is at work in the church, in the very house of God, taking what God has made holy and making it ordinary and common.

God has given us many gifts that are holy and sacred. But our tendency is to take the holy and use it for common, everyday purposes, to take God's gifts and twist them and use them for our own purposes.

The Ten Commandments show us how we have failed to keep the things of God holy and sacred.

In the first commandment, God explains how He is the only holy one, the only one worthy of worship. But we make God common and ordinary when trust in ourselves or our stuff rather than fearing God, loving God and trusting in Him above all things.

In the second commandment, God gives us His holy name to use in prayer, praise and thanksgiving. But how do we use God's name? We use it to curse and swear. "Oh my God," we say, and much, much worse without a second thought.

In the third commandment, God gives us a holy day, a day to spend at rest hearing God's Word, spending time in prayer. But do we really keep this day sacred? Is Sunday a holy day, a day of rest, or a day for sports and baby showers, a day for work and chores rather than rest?

In the fourth commandment, God gives us parents and other authorities. These are special people, holy people, representatives of God Himself. We should respect them, obey them, pray for them, and yet we rebel against them, treat them like ordinary people, and do things our own way.

In the fifth commandment, God gives you your neighbor as someone holy to love and care for, but how often do we treat people around us as though they were out to take care of us, to serve us and do what we want?

In the sixth commandment, God gives you your spouse as a holy person to love faithfully. There's a reason it's called holy matrimony. But how often do you treat your spouse like an ordinary person? You don't have to be married to break the sixth commandment. Married or not, how often do you lust after someone you're not married to?

In the seventh commandment, God gives you your possessions as holy things, gifts from God to take care of your needs and your neighbors. But how often do you want more and more,

unhappy with what God has given you, or squander God's gifts wastefully, using them for yourself instead of using them wisely in service to God and neighbor?

In the eighth commandment, God gives you your neighbor's reputation as a holy thing, but how often to you tell lies and rumors about other people, assuming the worst about them.

In the ninth commandment, God gives your house and home as a holy place to live and raise your family, but how often do you treat it as an ordinary piece of land, always wanting something more, something better.

In the tenth commandment, God gives you your relationships with your family and friends, coworkers, roommates, classmates and teammates as holy bonds to be maintained, but how often do we use these relationships for our own advantage, and seek to win over the friends of others?

All these holy things are God's gifts to you, for your good, for you to experience God and His grace and mercy. But you've taken all these holy things and used them for yourself, for your own profit.

That's what the people of Israel had done to the Temple.

God had given them a holy place, a place where His name would dwell and He would hear their prayers. It was to be a place of forgiveness, a place for celebrating with family, and place to come and just be in God's presence.

But the people had taken that holy place and turned it into an ordinary business, a place to make a profit, a place to fleece the tourists from out of town.

Have you ever gone somewhere on vacation, somewhere special that you'd been planning for and saving up for a long time, a trip that you had really been looking forward to, but then when you get there you've been disappointed. It wasn't as special as you were expecting. Maybe it was dirty. Maybe the people were rude. Maybe it was overpriced and expensive.

This is what the visitors to Jerusalem would have felt. Here they come to Jerusalem for the Passover. For some people this was a once in a lifetime opportunity. They had travelled for weeks, even months by sea, by land to come to the holy city and to the temple mount.

And what did they find when they got there? Money changers. "Sorry, your money isn't good here, if you want to buy an animal to sacrifice, you'll need to get official temple currency." "Sorry, no outside animals. If you want to make a sacrifice, you'll need to buy one of ours."

And what should have been a glorious worship experience was turned into a major hassle, as the greedy temple workers took advantage of the pilgrims. They took a holy place, a place of prayer, and made it some place ordinary.

So Jesus got rid of it all. Sheep- out. Oxen- out. Pigeons- out. Coins- out. Jesus does some Spring cleaning there in the temple.

What is more, Jesus says that he's going to get rid of the temple completely. Destroy it. Get rid of it. Replace it with something better.

Jesus is going to replace the temple with His own body. Jesus will be the new temple. Jesus Himself will be the holy place, the meeting place between God and man. If you want to be with God, you don't need to go to Jerusalem to the temple. Wherever Jesus is, there is God's presence.

So where is Jesus today? Where is His Holy Body?

It's here, on the altar. In the Lord's Supper you receive the very body of Christ for you.

And as you receive Christ's body, He makes you His body, the church. He makes you Holy and dwells in you- not as individuals, but together, collectively, with the rest of the church. This is very important. The Lord's Supper is not just between you and God, but between you and all the people who gather at the altar rail. If you're not willing to love and care for the other people you commune with, don't come.

Satan will tempt you, try to get you to consider the other people here not as God's holy people, but as ordinary people. He'll say mean things about the church. They're all a bunch of hypocrites. They're mean and judgmental. They only want your money, they don't really care about you. They're just ordinary people.

Yes, the church is made of sinner, but forgiven sinners, saint-sinners, holy sinners, baptized sinners, sinners fed with the very body of Christ.

Love the people here not because they deserve your love, but because God has made them holy by His blood.

And you, too. You are holy. You were made a child of God in holy baptism, by His Holy Spirit, His Holy Word and the sign of the Holy Cross, your sins are forgiven in Holy Absolution, you eat and drink the holy body and blood of Jesus. You are not just an ordinary person. You are holy and precious to God.

The world may not see you this way. The world may see you as weak, lowly and foolish, plain and ordinary, nothing special.

But that's not how God sees you. In His eyes you are forgiven, precious and holy. You are a member of the body of Christ, the church

Jesus predicted that after three days, His body would rise again, and He did. Not even death itself can destroy Jesus' holy body.

You are a member of Jesus' body. And so death will not destroy you, either. Just as Jesus rose, you, too, will rise, because you are holy.