

LENT 3, YEAR B

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

The Gospel

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Prayer:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Sermon:

The past few months have reminded me,
how quickly things can change in our old World.

Science is the new religion of our time,
And we like to imagine that through it we are
as nearly godlike as the far too human gods
people once thought dwelled on Mount Olympus.

But, once in a while, life throws us a curve ball,
all we start bumping into one little thing after another,
some strange virus, or Snowmageddon ...
or an errant driver on Interstate 35...

and we are reminded that *God is God and We are Not.*

Today's story about Jesus Cleansing the Temple is well known.
It was supposed to be. It's in all 4 Gospels! ⁱ

But John's Gospel, as usually, has a different perspective.
Even John's timing story is different

In the 3 Synoptic Gospelsⁱⁱ, The Temple Cleansing happens
at the end of Jesus' ministry and,
it's connected with his Triumphant return to Jerusalem.

But, John puts this story at the beginning.

Some scholars think the Synoptics are historically accurate.

Maybe so.ⁱⁱⁱ

Some say that John had a more theological approach. *I agree.*

John wanted to show that Jesus really was the Son of God.

He organized his stories about Jesus to prove that point.

John saw Jesus' cleansing of the Temple as the begging of

His ministry as a Godly King ... free to act

with passion and power and defiance of worldly things.

John understood, and he wants us to understand,

that Jesus used the Temple to both establish his Sonship,

and to challenge the world's corrupted worship

and phony engagement with God.^{iv}

Roll on up, for my price is down

Come on in for the best in town

Take your pick of the finest wine

Lay your bets on this bird of mine

...

Name your price; I got everything

Come and buy, it's all going fast

Borrow cash on the finest terms

Hurry now while stocks still last...^v

Jesus knew that the Temple worship had replaced

the Godly path and the work of faith

So, he sent his message ...

“This not the Way!” “Things have to change.”

And he cleansed the Temple of liars and thieves.

This brave and risky action was no small thing.

Jesus was a faithful Jewish man. ^{vi}

Jesus, took a stand, and sent a message.

The Old Testament says;

“...let justice roll down ... like an overflowing stream.” ^{vii}

Let justice roll down.

The Temple leaders got the message. They didn't like it. ^{viii}

So they had Jesus killed.

People still get Jesus' message today.

Some don't like it. Most ignore it. Some pay lip-service.

But, whatever we do or don't do, in these perilous days,
our worship must not begin and end, on Sundays.

We are people who claim Jesus, and Jesus calls us
to live out our worship, each minute, each hour, each day

Not just here, but out in the world,

Where Our God Reigns, But the Devil puts up a helluva fight! ^{ix}

I recently mentioned to a few of our Bishop's,

And the New York Times reported...

These are hard days here at St. Christopher's.

Thousands of gallons of water flowed too free, and too long,
from frozen broken pipes.

Our wet sheetrock has been torn out,
and our carpets hauled away,

My heart breaks. Our nerves are tight.

Our eyes are red with fatigue. But the work continues.

In the midst of our rebuilding, there is a certain beauty.

This really is a house of prayer. No money changers.

Here, God reminds us, lest we forget, that

He is the author of peace and beauty and concord.

“...let justice roll down ... like an overflowing stream.”

A sweet light shines through our nave windows,

And I hear the voices of a loving people coming together.

God loves beautiful worship.

He loves us here, gathered in this beautiful place.

God loves worship that flows from a loving heart;

And the prayers and the songs that build His kingdom,
and rejuvenate His people.

In these COVID stained post-election days,

Uncertainty and worry are the coins of the realm.

But, in the midst of restoring our beloved and sacred church home,

We are called to worship.

Remember our Lord's words:

"A new command I give you: Love one another."^x

"...let justice roll down ... like an overflowing stream."

We are called to worship.

Both here, and through our daily lives,

in everything we do, we think and we say.

Everywhere we go, and with everyone we meet.

We are called to worship.

-- Worship Him while you wait patiently in a long line at HEB,
with a smile on your face.

-- Seek God's justice, offering mercy and love
to those who have wronged you.

-- Forgive the neighbor who didn't vote for your candidate.

-- Cheerfully clean up the mess that Snowmageddon left behind!

"...let justice roll down ... like an overflowing stream."

-- AMEN

ⁱ Only the Crucifixion, the Feeding of the 5000 and the Cleansing of the Temple are covered in all 4 Gospels.

ⁱⁱ Matthew, Mark and Luke.

ⁱⁱⁱ It's all about the Temple! At issue here was the Second Temple, the remains of which still stand on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. That Temple replaced Solomon's Temple (i.e., the First Temple), destroyed around 586 BCE, when Jerusalem was conquered and the Kingdom of Judah sent into exile, in Babylon. Around 516 BCE, the Second Temple period was built, but it was said to be rather modest compared to the grandeur of the First Temple. However, Herod the Great caused the Second Temple to be both renovated and expanded, beginning around 20 BCE; that remodeling is what the Jewish leaders refer to as "forty-six years" of construction. That Temple was destroyed by the Romans, possibly by accidental fire, at the conclusion of the Siege of Jerusalem, following one of the many unsuccessful Jewish rebellions, circa 70 AD

^{iv} In the reading, some of the Greek words are important: Jesus made a whip of cords, and aggressively threw or drove out (ἐκβάλλω *exebalen*) the buyers and the sellers, the sheep and the oxen that had turned his Father's house into an (οἶκον ἐμπορίου *oikon emporiou*) a house of commerce.

^v Jesus Christ Superstar

^{vi} He freely quoted from the Jewish Bible.

^{vii} Amos 5:24 NIV

^{viii} The faithful Jews, who had walked countless miles, to arrive at the Temple with the sacrificial animal they could afford. However, their animals had to meet Old Testament specifications, of which the Temple leaders were the sole judges. In this racket, no critter was good enough, so they took accepted the "defective" animal, in exchange for an approved animal, which of course costs money. There is always a transactional cost, as anyone who has ever traded in a used car knows!

Moreover, both the transaction and the Temple Tax had to be paid in Temple currency, purchased with regular money at an unfair exchange rate. "My temple should be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves. Get out! Get out!" See, Jesus Christ Superstar, by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

^{ix} Literally!

^x John 13:34 NIV