

John 2:13-22 ¹³ The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² 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.

“Cleansing the Temple”

My office at home is my inner sanctum. But, it's a mess. Dana keeps telling me that I would find it easier to work in there and be more productive if I would just put things away and get rid of all the clutter. I don't disagree with her. That's obvious. It's just that I find the task overwhelming. It's like death. I just don't want to think about it. And, I don't understand how the clutter happens either. A little over a year ago my office was organized. All my books were put away and alphabetically at that. I had only one little stack of stuff that deciding what to do with was absolutely beyond my capacity. So, I put it up on atop shelf. But now, I work in a cave. There's just enough room in there to get from the door to the desk chair and then on my desk there's just enough room for me to type. I even cleaned my desk off a month ago, but within four days it was a rat's nest again. I don't understand. What is the use in cleaning if it's just going to clutter up again?

I do need to do something about my office now...again. First, I know I need to cleanse my inner sanctum. But, I am at odds as to what I should do after that because I'm not sure that it's me who is causing the clutter. It could possibly be that the little pile of stuff left over from the last major cleaning is an elementary life form. It may be that all I need to do is just destroy that little stack and there will be no more clutter. But, in reality, it's more likely that the problem is me and what I need to do after that big initial cleaning is discipline myself to spend a few minutes a week straightening the office or even better make it a point to stay organized as I go. Then I wouldn't feel like such a ferret.

What if my office were a metaphor for human existence? I think we humans are pretty good at letting our inner sanctums get cluttered with stuff we just don't want to deal with but will sooner or later have to. When I say inner sanctum I mean the spiritual part of us which I consider to be the relational part of us; our relationship to God, to ourselves, and to others. We clutter up our inner sanctums with things we're too lazy, too hurt, too fearful, or too ashamed of to deal with. Regrets pile up - things we wished we'd said or done or not said and not done or just done differently. Unforgiveness piles up. Anxieties, financial worries make us feel like we're living in a muddy cistern during the spring thaw.

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That water keeps rising, but we can't seem to free our feet from the mud. There's pressure from work, the stress of making decisions that could come back to haunt you. Then, there's home. Many of us consider the home, the family to be the inner sanctum, but usually it's the rest of the family that pays for our neglect of our own inner sanctum.

What would happen if Jesus came to cleanse our inner sanctums? Is that something we would welcome? What tables would he overturn inside of us where we've been making deals that in small ways sacrifice our integrity? What sort of sheep and cattle and doves would he find in us – things that we readily keep on hand to sacrifice in an effort to bargain with God, things we say we're willing to give up should we ever need God on our side? Who or what would he run away with a whip?

This is Lent and it is the time of the year where we make an intentional effort to look deep inside ourselves and, if we are honest, what or should I say who we find there in our inner sanctums is troubled, hurt, broken, tired, cluttered, and too often a liar. Though unimaginable, we would like to have the clutter gone. But, do we really want Jesus, God, in there throwing stuff around. It's seems easier and safer to try to clean it up ourselves. You know, go to Chapters to get the book “Clean It up, Girlfriend” by Oprah Winfrey or “Peter Panning Your way to Total Victory” by Joel Osteen subtitled “Delude Yourself with Happy Thoughts” or, something serious like “The Purpose Driven Life” by Rick Warren. His plan only takes forty days. But, folks the Gospel says, Jesus Christ died for our sins and yes, we do want God inside us throwing stuff around.

I've been talking about inner sanctums because Jesus called himself the inner sanctum where God lives. At the heart of the Jerusalem temple was a small room called the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and where God promised to dwell. When Jesus came God's presence was no longer in the temple but Jesus. The word translated there as temple actually means the innermost part of a temple, the holiest place where the god was supposed to reside on earth. Jesus became the place on earth where God dwells. Paul says in Colossians, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross” (Col. 1:19-20). Now, since Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the church, the Christian church is the dwelling place of God on earth. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians, “Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple” (3:16-17). Then in Ephesians he writes, “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit” (2:19-21). All the “you's” in these verses are plural meaning “y'all”. We believer's in Jesus Christ together are God's temple, God's inner sanctum on earth. And, not only us together, but we each

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are God’s inner sanctum because of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in us. Paul writes in Romans, “But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you” (8:9-11).

Since, we each are an inner sanctum of God who in Christ by the working of his Spirit are being built together into the inner sanctum of God on earth, our inner sanctums are important because that is where the Spirit has come to live in us. He’s come to live in our spiritual part, the part of us that is relational, the part in which we relate to God, to ourselves, and to others. It is the gracious work of the Holy Spirit to clean our inner sanctums up, to heal the brokenness, to caress and cleanse us of our shame and guilt, and to strengthen us in our fatigue. These are things we cannot do by our own effort. When Jesus died on the cross he bore humanity’s sin away once and for all. That means for each of us our sin-filled inner sanctum’s have been cleansed once and for all. As far as God is concerned, there is nothing that can separate us from the love of God. Since, Jesus bore our sin away, it is now the work of the Holy Spirit to pick them up and carry them away.

If the Holy Spirit is at work within us making us to become more and more like Christ (and He is), then the things that concerned Jesus will begin to concern us, one thing here in particular. When Jesus cleansed the Jerusalem temple, his disciples remembered where it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” If the Holy Spirit is in us we will begin to get real serious about God’s temple here on earth, both our own inner sanctums (our relationship to God, self, and others) and to the church, the big temple, and Christ’s ministry of reconciling the world to God in himself. Zeal for God’s house will consume us.

One of the greatest misconceptions about the Christian faith is that we have to clean ourselves up before God will have anything to do with. It is completely the other way around. God sees our sin-shackled inner sanctums and has compassion on us and he decides to have something to do with us. By the death of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit he begins to clean us up because we simply are not able. The important thing for us to do then is to let him minister to us, to be open to his work within us. I’m going to harp on this again, immersing ourselves in prayer, the Scriptures, and worship both by ourselves and together is our primary work. Everything else will froth forth from the daily, routine maintenance of God’s temple. Zeal for his house, let it consume you. Amen