

## The Business of God's House

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple, he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore 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.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Jesus has a way of stirring things up. He rattles cages. He surprises people with His words and actions. Today's reading from John is one of those classic texts in which Jesus does something unexpected, something we wouldn't picture Him doing. Jesus—of whom we sing of being so sweet and so mild—makes a whip of cords and drives people out of the temple. Those who had turned the holy activities of the Lord's house into a business transaction, who dulled the edge of repentance and sacrifice with cold, hard coins and the ease of accessibility, receive no quarter from Jesus. Zeal for His Father's house consumed Him as He overturned the money-changers' tables and poured out their precious coins. This was surprising for all who witnessed it, as they immediately asked by what authority He did this: "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" Their shock was apparent. They had been called out, challenged, and rather than answering the challenge, they tried to question Jesus' authority.

Jesus still surprises. In fact, He surprises us. The author of Hebrews said it well: "It is for discipline you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" But we're still surprised every time we receive discipline—a word or action from God that drives us back to His straight paths, that warns us against some course of action we've begun. Like the Jews in our reading for today, we act surprised and pretend as if we did nothing to deserve discipline. But how many times have we treated our time in the Lord's house like a business transaction? We want to trade, to barter with God, to try to get a good deal out of Him—maximum profit for minimum cost. We

want to buy something from God, so we offer Him something. We hawk our wares, pretending that the meager goods we're selling to Him could buy anything. We complain when our time in God's presence isn't convenient, when it interferes with other things, other transactions we could be making. We go through the motions, only present because we have to be, doing everything out of rote efficiency, putting as little thought into it as we would a transaction with a market clerk. We take care of business and then go on our way.

But just as we settle into this pattern, this business rut, Jesus rattles us. He calls us to repent. We hear His words of warning, but we look around and think, "Me? Surely He's talking to everyone else." But then the Lord's word thunders on you like a hammer: "Yes, you. *You* shall have no other gods. *You* shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. *You* shall honor the Sabbath day by keeping it holy; by holding preaching and God's Word holy and gladly hearing and learning it; by not treating your time in the Lord's house as if you were at line in a bank."

And, like the Jews in the temple in our reading, we might take offense. We ask, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" What sign will you perform, Jesus, to show us that you have the right to startle us, to rattle us, to surprise us this way? By what authority do you say these things to us, Jesus? What gives you the right? Who do you think you are? This attitude betrays what's in our hearts. We don't like it when Jesus upsets the money-changer tables we've set up in the dark temples of our hearts and minds. The truth is that we want to do business with God. We want to barter with Him; we want to offer Him something, but only so long as it gets us something in return. We want to buy things from Him, to pretend that we have something He wants, something He needs, and that we can hold that over Him until we get what we want from Him. We'd rather buy than receive from Him freely. The sinner in us wants His house to be a place of trade, a house of business, where we control the scales and God is our customer.

But Jesus would have us look elsewhere. God isn't interested in being a business partner with you. He doesn't want to be your customer; He doesn't want you to be His. No, He wants to be your Savior.

He shows this with the sign He offers. We ask, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” The sign He offers is His resurrection. “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He sets forth the sign of Jonah, the sign of His death and rising again to life. And this sign, this resurrection, is given in order to save you from the deal you’ve made with death, from your transaction with trespasses. He doesn’t want to buy anything from you—He wants to redeem you, to purchase and win you. So He pours out not coins, not gold or silver, but His holy precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. All this He offers for you, to rescue you from the mess you’ve made with your transactions, with your imagined trade.

It’s with this sign—His resurrection from the dead—that Jesus causes faith to spring up, so that you believe the Scripture and the word that Jesus has spoken. This sign leads you to believe that all of this has been done for you, that there’s nothing He won’t do to make you His. And so you are given a place in your Father’s house, never to be driven out. You’re given a place, not to do business with your Father, but to receive from Him freely—to receive forgiveness and life, in all of its richness and fullness. He gives you wine and milk and water without price; bread and rich food without money. It’s through this sign of His resurrection, His life given to you through priceless water and bread and wine, that you too will be rebuilt and resurrected as a living temple of your living God, to be in His presence forever. In the name of Jesus, our Savior and Temple, Amen.