

Sermon for Lenten Midweek #2

Date: February 24, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 56:1-8

Epistle Reading: 1 Peter 1:13-21

Gospel Reading: Mark 11:15-19



Sermon Text: Mark 11:15-19

Sermon Title: Significant Action: Monday of Holy Week

Hymns:

LSB 881 – Christ, Mighty Savior (*Tune LSB 439*)

LSB 933 – My Soul Rejoices

LSB 422 – On My Heart Imprint your Image

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Mark 11:15-19

And they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. And he was teaching them and saying to them, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” And the chief priests and the scribes heard it and were seeking a way to destroy him, for they feared him, because all the crowd was astonished at his teaching. And when evening came they went out of the city.

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Grace to you and peace, in Jesus' Holy Name. Amen.

We're probably familiar with the details of the major events that took place on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday, but what took place on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week? Those three days contain some of Jesus' most significant action, most significant teaching, and most significant confrontation with the Temple authority.

For the next five midweek Lenten services, we explore what took place on the three significant days between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday.

What we read for today takes place on Monday of Holy Week. The day before, on Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with enthusiasm and shouts of, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"¹ Then Palm Sunday ended on a bit of an ominous note as St. Mark records:

"[Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. And when He had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve."²

Then on Monday of Holy Week, Jesus would do a lot more than just look around the Temple grounds. Jesus was disgusted with what He saw, and our Lord took significant action.

Mark records, Jesus began to drive out those who sold, and those who bought in the Temple. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus proclaims, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations."³

This all might appear a bit shocking to us. This isn't the way we're accustomed to seeing Jesus. It is definitely not the meek and mild Jesus we sang about at Christmas. So just what is happening here? Each year, at the Passover festival, multitudes would come to Jerusalem to celebrate. Many came from far away, and it was much easier for them to buy the animals they needed to sacrifice at the Temple, rather than bring the animals with them over long distances.

To make matters convenient, the priests just happened to have pre-approved animals for these travelers to purchase. Of course, these animals came at a premium price. There were even reports of kickbacks to some of the priests. There were reports of priests rejecting animals purchased at places other than the official Temple vendors, to force people to buy from certain salesmen.

1 Matthew 21:9

2 Mark 11:11

3 Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17

Travelers to Jerusalem also came with foreign currency and had to exchange it for the Temple currency. You might expect, there were reports of the money-changers charging unfair exchange fees. The focus was no longer on God, prayer and sacrifice, but on the “business” of the Temple at Passover.

If that’s not bad enough there was something still more horrible happening. Jesus’ quote of Isaiah states that the Temple was to be a “house of prayer for all the nations.” It was to be a house of prayer not just for Jews, but for Gentiles too; for us, the outsiders. That’s why the Temple was constructed with a court for male Jews, a court for female Jews, and a court for the Gentiles, for our people, the outsiders.

When these Temple courts were converted into marketplaces, where would the Gentiles, the “nations,” be able to pray? The Temple, meant to be a house of prayer for all nations, was instead a money-making machine for the Temple authority and all who were involved in their greed.

That is why Jesus launched into significant action, clearing the Temple grounds. A day of significant action on the part of Jesus sends a message to you and to me. We can be tempted to turn the practice of the Christian faith into a means to line our pockets, or fulfill whatever false god we’ve concocted. It is so easy for us in our culture, to give income and expenses such a high priority that we lose sight of the real reason we’re doing what we’re doing as a Church.

The money-changers and the vendors who sold animals for sacrifice, placed a real obstacle in the way for people, especially Gentiles, to worship God. In fact, they basically excluded the Gentiles from being able to pray and worship in the Temple courts at all. Are there obstacles to the worship of God in your life today? Are there obstacles that are self-inflicted? Are there obstacles that are placed there by someone else, maybe even someone close to you? Could you be placing obstacles in the lives of others who seek to worship?

Jesus would like nothing more than to take significant action in overturning and driving those obstacles out of your life, so that you might receive from Him His good gifts of Word and Sacrament.

It was significant action indeed on the part of Jesus on the Monday of this most Holy Week. Yet, it would pale by comparison to the significant action He would take for you at the end of this week. He would not drive vendors and animals from the Temple court. Instead, He would drive sin, death and the devil from their place of rule and dominance in the lives of people. In so doing, He drove out that which separated us from God, our sin.

All that Jesus accomplished for you became yours on a wonderful day of significant action in your life, the day of your Holy Baptism. On that day, the Holy Spirit, working through water and the Word, called you to faith, washed away your sin, claimed you as a child of God, and made you an heir of everlasting life. A day of significant action on God's part, indeed.

As you might expect, the Temple authority were not pleased with the action Jesus took on Monday of Holy Week. It definitely wasn't good for business. Mark even records that the chief priests and scribes were seeking a way to destroy Jesus.

By the end of Holy Week, they will think that they have done exactly that. We'll continue to explore that through these Lenten service as we watch what happens on these "Three Significant Days" of Holy Week.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**

