

“Building A New Temple”

John 2:13-22

March 4, 2018

: The Third Sunday in Lent

I will never forget the time when I was talking with a group of young deaf Sunday School students back in Wisconsin about the Church. I talked about God being present here and at this is God’s House. After I was finished, I could see that one young boy had a question that was troubling him. He hesitantly raised up his hand and asked, “This is God’s house, right?” I replied, “Yes, this is God’s house.” The boy thought for a second and then ask, “if this is God’s house, where is His bedroom?”

When thinking about the house of the Lord, we should probably avoid two extreme misinterpretations. First, the house of the Lord is not a literal residence, replete with bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms, man caves, and so on. That’s how the young deaf boy viewed the building.

On the other hand, the house of the Lord is also not merely an ordinary building where meetings and gatherings of various kinds can be held. This attitude is reflected in many building projects for churches today. The idea is to build a multipurpose room/gym which can be used for worship and postponing or not ever building a sanctuary for worship.

Which is correct? Is either correct? Our Gospel lesson addresses this issue.

First, however, we should consider why God ever sought refuge in a sanctuary in the first place. It was not to house God, as if the Creator of the heavens and the earth needed a place to stay which human beings could build for Him. Nor, was it to accommodate worshipers by providing a place to gather. A temple was an intermediary structure to protect people from a holy God. Remember way back when the world had first begun, there was no Temple of any kind. Adam and Eve walked with God directly. They had no reason to fear God, nor did they have any reason to need protection from. Adam and Eve were holy as God is holy and therefore were in perfect harmony with Him. The last book of the Bible, Revelation, makes the point that, in heaven, there is no Temple either.

That’s obviously not the case today. And what has changed near the beginning of the world? What will change at the end of the world? The introduction of sin into this world through Adam and Eve and its perpetuation through all of us to the present day has created a separation between us and God. There is a barrier between God and humanity because of that. This was no symbolic barrier, but a very real one. A holy God could not accept sin in His presence. Sinful people could not see the glory of God and live. So, something had to be done so something had to be constructed by people at the behest of God.

First, there was the tabernacle – a tent-Temple – which the Israelite people used during their forty-year wandering in the wilderness. This was the place where the Lord God literally dwelt. (Thus, the reference to the “house” of the Lord). The presence of God in the tabernacle was shown when the great cloud of glory – the shekinah (literally, “the dwelling”) – settled on the tabernacle for all to see. Like the Temple which would come after it, the tabernacle was

equipped with a Holy Place into which only the priests could go and a Holy of Holies into which only the High Priest could enter once a year. The tabernacle allowed God to come to His people without destroying them and which would be the way for people to come to God again, without being destroyed, in order to bring their sacrifices and their prayers to God and receive, from God, His gifts of forgiveness and restoration.

Second, there was the Temple. The first Temple was built by Solomon, many years after the wandering in the wilderness was over. It wasn't very big. We've all likely seen Sunday school lessons with pictures of a huge structure with Roman pillars and the like, but it wasn't like that at all. It wasn't even as big as the king's palace, prompting some commentators to say it was more like a royal chapel rather than a real Temple. Nevertheless, despite the size of the structure, its function remains the same. It was a way for a holy God to dwell among his people without destroying them. It was also a way for the people to approach God with their prayers, their offerings, and the requests. Another, even smaller, Temple was built after the people of Judah returned back from captivity in Babylon.. It was built by Ezra and Nehemiah. I learned while in

Israel that this Temple is not even considered to be a separate Temple, but a restoration of Solomon's Temple. The biggest Temple of them all is finally built by King Herod, the Great. It was known far and wide as the finest and largest Temple in the known world time. It was here where God was located and where He could dwell among His people. It was here that the people came to offer their sacrifices for sin. It was also the place where they could worship and pray to God, especially on the high holy days.

It was at one of these high holy days – the Passover – when Jesus and his disciples came to the Temple. It was here that we see Jesus to do something which we rarely see Him do and which we usually think is sinful. He got angry. What brought forth Jesus righteous anger? He saw people selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and others who were changing money for the worshipers. This was a useful service for worshipers who came from faraway places. They didn't have to bring the animals with them but could purchase them here. Also, there were people changing money from the foreign currency of the worshipers into currency which was accepted at the Temple.

What infuriated Jesus so? Many think it was because the practice of selling sacrificial victims and changing money was corrupt. Jesus was standing up for the "every man" who was being gouged when he came to the Temple. However, that's not it at all. The problem was not that such corrupt practices were taking place in the temple. The problem was that they were being practiced there at all. Jesus made a whip of cords (literally a scourge) and drove the seller of sacrifices out and overturned the table of the money changers.

He states his reason very clearly, "Take these things away; do not make my father's house a house of trade." This was the dwelling place of God. It is a place for God to meet His people and for people to come to God. It was not to be a place of business, clean or corrupt. It's like if someone came into your house and began having a Tupperware sale or Amway sale in your living room. The offense would not be whether you like Tupperware or Amway products or that

they were charging to higher prices. The offense would be that they were having the sale there in the first place.

Then came a seismic shift regarding the dwelling place of God which still affects us even today. The Jews ask for a sign, divine approval, for what he had done in the Temple. Jesus responds by saying that, from now on, God's dwelling would be in a very different place and in a very different way. He says to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews take him literally and think of the massive building structure which surrounds them.

Any claim that Jesus (or anyone else, for that matter) could tear down this massive structure is ludicrous. As the Jews rightly observed, construction on this huge Temple had begun forty-six years before this event happened. They would not finish the construction of this Temple for approximately thirty more years. Even more impossible than tearing down the structure is

Jesus' claim that he could rebuild this Temple which has taken seventy-six years to build in only three days is absurd. However, Jesus is not talking about this physical Temple. He is

talking about His own body. What exactly is Jesus saying? He is saying that, through His death and resurrection, He is raising a new Temple. And that Temple is Him. From that point onward, the dwelling place of God is not in a particular building or any particular location like the

Temple in Jerusalem, but in Jesus Himself. That is why, in the first chapter of his Gospel, John had written, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,

glory as that of the only son from the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14) the word used here for "dwell" literally means "to pitch a tent." One could paraphrase that and say, "and the

Word became flesh and tabernacle among us." God is located in Jesus. St. Paul would go on to write in Colossians, "for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:19-20)

Jesus is the new Temple. In Him God is pleased to dwell. Here God meets man to be reconciled (that is to be forgiven of all sin and put into a right relationship with God again, through the sacrifice, not of animals but by the sacrifice of the Son of God Himself. Through His blood shed on the cross, we have forgiveness of sin and are at peace with God. We come to God, not by going to a structure in Jerusalem or anywhere else, but by coming right here. Here is the literal house of God, the place of His dwelling where we may find His gifts to sustain us through life and to bring us through the grave to life everlasting.

Here, in this place, is God because Jesus is here. Jesus has promised to be present. He said, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them." (Matthew 18:20) Jesus has promised blessing through His presence. Here, on our altar, resides the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is a great honor indeed. God comes to you, not in some vague spiritual way, but in a specific and real way. What great joy, great comfort, and great assurance there is for us as we gather here. God comes to this place and we come to Him.

Although we are not selling animals for sacrifice or exchanging money here in this place, might not the literal and real presence of God in this place influence our behavior? If we remember that Almighty God is truly here, would it influence how we act when we come into the church, how we act during Divine Service, and how we leave this place?

Might it also not influence our priorities with regard to what goes on here? I would think that, is here knowing that this church is the dwelling place of God and that He will be present through His Son, Jesus Christ to create peace between Himself and the people gathered here through the forgiveness of sins; to give purpose in life now; and to ensure eternal life in a manner that is superior to the best life this earth has to offer, I would think that reasons for not being present here – such as I would prefer to sleep; I have an athletic match to attend; or I just wish to get away from it all, would sound very inadequate. So, come to God's house, the Temple of the Lord, the place where He is really and truly present. Commune with God in this place. Receive His good gifts in the Word of God, made flesh, read, and preached here; and in His true body and true blood in with an under the body and blood of Jesus Christ – the very body offered up for you on the cross and the very blood shed for you for the forgiveness of course. Despite having no bedrooms, this is the house of God. Amen