

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR MARCH 3/4, 2024**

¹³ The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. ¹⁵ He made a whip of cords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those selling doves he said, "Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a place of business!"

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ So the Jews responded, "What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?"

¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."

²⁰ The Jews said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.

(John 2:13-22 EHV)

A little boy had just gone on a rampage through the ladies' bake sale. Cookies and pies scattered all over the floor. Money poured out, coins rolling everywhere. His mother comes and grabs him by the scruff of the neck and says, "What on earth are you doing? Who told you to do this?" The little boy says, "I learned it today in Sunday school. The teacher asked us, 'What would Jesus do?'"

This is a different kind of Jesus than we're used to, or at least as the world would like to think of him. This is no mild-mannered, reasonable rabbi. Seems like he might need some medication, or perhaps have some of the 180 gallons of premium wine he'd recently made for a wedding celebration that had run out – maybe relax him a bit, loosen him up. Talk about embarrassing. Ever been at a restaurant and someone in your group starts to complain loudly about the food and the service. You're embarrassed by them and for them. Were the disciples embarrassed by Jesus, the whip-cracking, table-turning, money-scattering, red-faced leader in need of possible anger management therapy?

Why is he so angry? Need we look into his childhood? Nope, we need look no further than where Jesus is and what he sees. This is **ZEAL REVEALED**. Zeal for his Father's house. It's Passover, and Jerusalem is filled with out-of-towners, pilgrims making the annual trek for this most important religious festival. The Passover meal had to be arranged for and celebrated. Animals had to be sacrificed. The temple tax had to be paid. To serve people who traveled long distances, a booming business had developed selling animals for sacrifice and changing foreign currency so pilgrims from out of country could pay the temple tax. These were necessary and legal practices, but subject to misuse and exorbitant fees, all in the name of religion.

Jesus saw a marketplace, a shopping mall, "crass commercialism" (Martin Luther called it). Greek word is "emporium." This was not downtown Jerusalem, the business district, the shopping mall out in the suburbs. This is the outer courtyard of the Temple, the place where Gentiles came to worship. Gentiles were not allowed to enter the Temple itself so the outer courtyard was the closest they could get for true worship. This was where all the buying and selling was taking place. You don't think this led to people thinking, "All the church wants is my money?" when worship was supposed to be a place where people could escape the world for a bit and hear the Word of God. Jesus is incensed. Outraged. He gets physical, and verbal. ***"Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a place of business!"*** (v. 16)

Stop! How dare you! How dare I! How dare we...what? There's no Starbucks in the entryway. No ill-conceived fundraisers. We don't ask the community for money, we don't give the impression that all the church wants is people's money. How dare we...let anything get in the way of our Father's house, of worship,

of time in the Word. But we're here, right? Each of us. The fact that we're here reveals our zeal, right?

It's interesting that the Old Testament reading today gives us a refresher course on how we're doing in terms of our zeal for God and his Word, on how grim our situation is if left to ourselves. Straight from Sinai comes the mirror of God's Word. You likely looked in a mirror before you came here today, now let's look into this mirror of God's Law:

- 1) You shall have no other gods.
- 2) You shall not misuse God's Name.
- 3) Remember the Sabbath day (i.e., don't forget to hear and learn God's Word and to worship; not just at Christmas and Easter, but regularly, and not just weekly if you are able, but daily).
- 4) Honor father and mother. Respect all authority.
- 5-7) Don't murder, commit adultery, steal. (Don't even think about it, meaning don't hate, don't look or think lustfully about others, don't even contemplate stealing time from work or stuff from others, even if you think they won't miss it or don't need it)
- 8) Don't lie about others.
- 9,10) Don't want things you can't have that others have

Our natural response to falling short of God's demands is to try harder, promise to improve, make resolutions, to at least be better than someone else. Or perhaps I can get on God's good side with a bit of time and a check in the offering plate. God doesn't want improvement or effort or bits and pieces of what we can "spare." He demands perfection. He wants all of you/me. But by nature we are unable to offer him anything of ourselves. By nature our zeal isn't for our Father's house or for his Word, it's for self, for me.

Some of the Jews confront Jesus over his messy temper tantrum. "Who do you think you are? Give us a sign. ***'Prove you can do these things.'***" (v. 18b) Jesus gave them one. It wasn't exactly what they were looking for. It wasn't an answer they even understood. In fact, Jesus' own disciples really didn't understand the answer until after he had risen from the dead. ***"Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.' The Jews said, 'It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?' But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.'***" (vv. 19-22)

More zeal revealed here. Jesus' zeal for lost souls, for our souls. This is why he had come, and why in just a few years he would return for another Passover and offer himself as the perfect Lamb of sacrifice. The Jews were thinking building. It's taken 46 years to build this Temple, another 38 before it's completely finished (64 AD). And then six years later, in 70 AD, the Romans would destroy it.

But Jesus was talking about his body, how he would offer his own body on the cross for their sins, for yours and mine, for the sins of the world. How three days later, he would rise from the dead, an astonishing feat, necessary for forgiveness and life with the Father, the Father who reached out to us and all of sinful humanity through the flesh and blood of his Son. Such love, such zeal Jesus shows for the Father and for us. He had every right to clean house as people were bringing the world into the church, making it hard to see the Father's amazing grace. He had every right to clean house because he had come to cleanse hearts, and set us right with the Father.

Brothers and sisters, fellow recipients of God's grace through Christ, zeal revealed deserves a response. Don't look around at/think about others. What is your response? Zeal revealed, zeal evident to others, especially to the Father? Or zeal concealed, more tepid and timid than vibrant and energetic, more apathetic than enthusiastic. Or worse, zeal congealed, leftovers. You know how soup gets when left out on the stove. Clumpy, unattractive, disgusting – is that what our zeal looks like to God? Grudging leftovers, less than our best. If we don't want to give him our best, don't give anything at all. He won't settle for seconds/thirds, for less than our best. Not when he's given us his all, his best.

And a word of warning. Keep world out of church. Be zealous for the Father's house, his Word, his message. The world's emphasis on works, getting what you deserve, making your own way, making transactions and deals have no place here. Nor does armchair psychology. Here the message is grace, not works; undeserved love rather than the punishment we actually deserve; free and generous gifts from the hand of a gracious God rather than deal making with a cutthroat deity. Christ crucified and risen again, and nothing else.

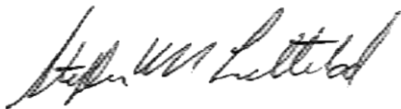
And then the church (you and I/we) go out into the world proclaiming this with Spirit-filled energy and zeal. If feathers are ruffled so be it. If complacent, self-satisfied hearts are made to be uncomfortable, so be it. When souls find rest in God alone, zeal achieves what zeal reveals through Jesus.

One last lesson from Jesus here. What was his primary objection to the whole scene at the Temple courtyard? Was it financial? No, many of the transactions were prescribed and necessary as part of the sacrificial system in place. What made Jesus upset was the spiritual component of this, that this was no way to welcome people to his Father's house, where they could hear the Father's Words of love.

The Jews/insiders, knew all about this, but they got to go inside the Temple itself at certain times. But Gentiles, outsiders hungry for knowledge/desperate for forgiveness/yearning for a relationship with the living God – the closest they could get was the Temple courtyard (outside of the Temple). And this emporium/marketplace/Black Friday shopping mall frenzy is what they saw.

How do we greet guests/outsideers? Do we welcome them with open arms or are we quick to look for people we know? Do we treat newcomers/guests as brothers or as a bother? What obstacles do we put in the way of guests that we might need to remove? Anything personal or traditional? I believe we generally do well with this, but we can always improve, try to see things from the point of view of others. We're not going to/we cannot change the message, but as the messengers we can always re-evaluate our welcome of others. In all that we say and do, our goal is for people to meet Jesus and to know his love. Which reminds me...whom will you invite to Easter worship, just four weeks away?

Do you have zeal for the Father's house, the Savior's Word? Jesus didn't just "like" his church, his Father's house on Facebook, a casual click on a comfortable keyboard. He showed his "like," he revealed his zeal. Now it's your turn. May his zeal be revealed through you to the glory of the Father.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Stephen Luchterhand". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Stephen" written in a larger, more prominent hand than the last name "Luchterhand".

Pastor Stephen Luchterhand
Minocqua, WI