LORD OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH GARNER, NC 3/4/18

A Temple Riot

In the name….Let us pray….

Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild. It is a hymn by John Wesley, that is the way we usually think about Jesus. Jesus walking the countryside and preaching, teaching, and healing. This gospel is not the Jesus we usual think of. He was angry .

The text tells us it was almost Passover and like almost 20 years ago when His parents went up to Jerusalem when He was young, he went to Jerusalem and He goes to the Temple, His Father’s House and He saw something He expected to find the Temple as it should be, a place of prayer and worship. Instead He found people selling all kinds of animals, and of course, they are not the cleanest cattle, sheep, doves. Remember, the first time Jesus was brought to the temple was for His Presentation in the Temple, His purification. So His parents would have bought some doves as an offering for the occasion, but the deal would have been made outside.

If you visit any Buddhist temple in China, you can buy incense in order to present it symbolic of the smoke rising up to the Buddha. But the selling of the incense takes place outside. If you worship at an Orthodox Church in Russia, the Gift shop is open during worship, but even does not happen inside the sanctuary. Jesus goes in expecting a quiet worshipful setting, instead he sees a market place. He does not make a comparison between selling of the animals and money changers. Remember people would be coming from other areas maybe bringing with them different coinage although most would probably have some image of Caesar on the coin. And He responds with a one man riot, He makes a whip of cords and drove them all out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out all the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. He separates His response to cattle and sheep and then specifically talks of the doves. He would have known the doves were used as an offering, His parents purchased them when He was a baby, and He is saying even those need to go.

Those inside must have been stunned wondering who let this madman in. If there was security, they would have been on it No one stops His rant. Get these things out of here. Stop making my Father’s House a marketplace.

The lectionary planners put the Exodus lesson of the Ten Commandments, the Mosaic code, as the Old Testament lesson for today, because I feel Jesus was doing this with the Ten Commandments in mind. Having no other gods? That includes the image of Caesar on the coins. Remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy? Livestock sales in the Temple. I don’t think so. It was not Sabbath, even more important, it was Passover a high holy time for God’s chosen people who are remembering how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt by “Passing Over the doors of the Paschal Lamb” and freeing the people from Egyptian oppression. Bearing false witness. If a visitor came who was still genuinely trying to follow the Mosaic code, this would not be a witness to them. Once again, you the people of Lord of Life witnessed to God’s love by providing a wonderful reception following the funeral of Corrine yesterday. The problem was little was eaten. The teachers here were not the teachers I know. Usually when there is free food, they are all over it. However, we all benefit. We will have a plentiful fellowship after worship today.\

Stealing, depending how honorable the merchants and moneychangers Jesus was alluding to the fact that they were stealing from the people, for Jesus any deal made in the Temple was probably made in a way that would have made it seem that “if you are really religious, you would buy a livre animal for sacrifice. If you are really religious, you would exchange money to do so or to purchase some temple trinkets. Coveting, the merchants would have been coveting Passover Pilgrims money in order to pad their own accounts. Jesus was not seeing the Mosaic covenant being carried out here and so He took action.

And we need to do the same, not just with our sanctuary but with whatever it means for us to witness to others regarding God and the Church. We need to also examine our rituals and practices in our own lives secular and religious to hold on to those which are life-giving and lead to God and get rid of those that are not.

Jesus saw that the Temple to God His Father no longer showed the way to God because it was cluttered with complicated rituals and requirements. Jesus was saying anything that pulls people off the path to God needs to go.

Post Jesus, Paul in the second lesson gives his take on this matter. “Jews demand signs, he say, Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Keeping our eyes on the Cross we will stay on the path to God.\

In the name…