

Lent 3, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
John 2: 13 – 22

The sermon text this morning is the Gospel lesson, found in John chapter 2. It is the story, perhaps familiar, of Jesus cleansing the Temple. Jesus, in a fit of righteous anger, driving out the money changers and herding out the sheep salesmen and kicking out the vendors, Jesus cleansing the Temple because listen people. The house of God, is meant to be a house of prayer.

Grace mercy and truth be multiplied among you in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

I suppose the first reaction some of you might have, after hearing this Gospel story of Jesus cleansing the Temple and driving out all the small business concerns—maybe your first reaction is to go down the stairs into the Fellowship Hall, and quickly, carefully start removing the Silent Auction items from the church—before some guy shows up with a homemade whip and begins breaking everything to pieces. And who knows, maybe we should do that, maybe we should empty God's house of all our little fundraising projects and instead focus simply and completely on worship and prayer and Bible study, maybe we ought to. But before we decide to do that. Since you're all, seated so comfortably. Let's look at this lesson, and understand what's going on here and, what it's trying to tell us. Because the lesson this morning might run a little deeper, than a Silent Auction fundraiser.

You see way back when. Way back when, Moses and the people were slaves in the land of Egypt, but God stretched forth His mighty hand and God rescued these people, leading them out of Egypt across the wilderness, to the joy and freedom of the Promised Land. You remember the story—the plagues of Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea; the Passover. The Passover—a lamb was killed, a lamb was eaten, the blood of the lamb smeared on the doorpost as a sign, that the Angel of Death should Pass Over this house. And this Passover event, was a very big deal, and the people who were there when it happened believed God with all their hearts and gave their lives to God fully and completely, they had seen what God can do! They had experienced His love and power first hand! They swore to celebrate the Passover every single year, that day forth,

forevermore.

And at first it was easy, celebrating the Passover I mean. They believed! And not only did they believe but, just so happened, they were shepherds, so every year they could just go and pick out a lamb from the flock, observe this great Passover celebration. Time marches on. Time marches on, people hear the story over and over and over again, it's not that they don't believe. It's not that they don't believe, it's just that it all becomes so ordinary, so matter of fact, so routine, "oh would you look at the calendar, my goodness it's almost Passover time again, and here I haven't put away all the Hanukkah dishes yet!" And, as time rolls on, fewer and fewer people were actually shepherds, life in the Holy Land when Jesus walked this earth was surprisingly urban. So, to celebrate this Passover thing, people who believed but frankly had other things to do and just wanted to buy a lamb, do their duty and get this holiday over with? Well very conveniently, lambs were sold at the Temple. Along with doves and candles and scented olive oils and all the other things you could possibly need for the perfect holiday celebration, and here's the point. Here's the point. People started in the days of Moses with a living, burning faith. By the time we get to today's lesson, what they had was a religion. They started with faith, they ended up with religion, they started out in this relationship with God. They ended, with a few spiritual duties to perform and frankly, get out of the way so they could get on to other things, and that's a problem. That's a problem. Because religion will get you nowhere. Religion is worthless and will get you nowhere, but a living faith in the living God? A daily walk with the Lord?—well, that's salvation for us, and all who believe.

What Jesus was upset with in this Gospel lesson—people who started out with faith, but ended up with religion. People who started out walking with God, on fire for God! But who then settled for a few spiritual duties, a few religious obligations. People a lot like us, you know? "Faithful" members of a church who make it to worship Christmas and Easter and if we're lucky a couple points in between. Parents for whom Baptism is something you get done for your kids, and confirmation is something you drop them off for once a week. Then when the last one is

confirmed—hurrah, we've done our duty, we're through, good bye! People for whom faith is a nice word and church is a few hoops to jump through and the cross a pretty piece of jewelry, and that's a problem. That's a problem, because that's religion. That's all, it's religion, and Jesus Christ is totally unimpressed with your religion. As far as Christ is concerned, you can keep your religion, get it out of here, it'll get you nowhere! What He's looking for is faith, what He is looking for is a living, breathing relationship, day in day out, starting now, lasting for eternity.

The problem is not a silent auction, anymore than the problem back then was a flea market in the Temple courtyard. The real problem is people who are willing to settle for religion, and call it good enough. People going through the motions, when God is looking for the heart! Remember, Jesus is not one who simply went through the motions for you. He died, on a cross, then rose again from the dead, He didn't phone it in. He didn't drop the kids off then dash back home, more important things to do. He gave His heart, He gave His life, for you, for your salvation, and He now bids you to rise and follow. Lose your religion. Lose your religion, catch the faith! And let the Lord Jesus cleanse the Temple that is your heart, and make it His dwelling place this day forth, and forevermore. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.