

“In Three Days” – Mar. 3, 24

John 2:13-22

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” 18 The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” 19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” 20 The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” (NRSV)

I’ve recently read an article titled, “Five Ways Hiking Is Good for You,” published by UC Berkeley’s Greater Good Science Center, which is one of the leading institutes for the science of happiness. The article says that hiking in the outdoors is so beneficial to our health and well-being that some doctors are now recommending it along with other forms of treatment.

All the exercise is good, but I will briefly share why the author likes hiking.

- (1) Hiking keeps your mind sharper than many other forms of exercise.
- (2) Hiking helps to keep you calm and happy.
- (3) Hiking helps your relationships.
- (4) Hiking can increase our creativity.
- (5) Hiking helps to build a positive relationship with the natural world.¹

In a word, we become healthier and happier when we go hiking. We are so blessed to have a Cape Cod Canal trail to walk or bike on.

Today is the Third Sunday in Lent. Have you ever thought how much happier it would be if you walked with Jesus? During Lent, we are invited to continue to walk with Jesus, becoming more attentive to the voice of the Holy Spirit who leads us every step of our faith journey. We are especially invited to walk with Jesus through prayer, fasting, and turning our lives to God.

¹ Jill Suttie, “Five Ways Hiking Is Good for You” (Greater Good Magazine)

Lent is often called a penitential season. In the Bible, repentance is not just about feeling sorry for our sins, but like a prodigal son, it is about returning to God and living a new life that honors God. That pleases God. And this new life will give us true happiness. The good news is that no matter how far we have gone from God, we are always welcome home. No wonder the best walk is walking toward God with Jesus.

Now, let's take a time machine and fly back to the time and space when Jesus lived. Let us imagine that we are standing with Jesus in the temple courtyard. It was almost time for Passover. Passover was a pilgrimage feast. Since many people traveled a great distance to worship in the temple in Jerusalem, they couldn't bring livestock for sacrifice. They had to buy animals at the temple for burnt offerings. They also had to change Greek or Roman coins into Jewish and Tyrian money to pay the temple tax, because those foreign currencies were considered unclean.

Unfortunately, merchants sold animals for sacrifice at exorbitant prices, and money changers charged excessive fees equivalent to the daily wages of ordinary people. The high price would also have included the amount demanded by the Roman soldiers guarding the temple. In such situation, priests, merchants, and others formed corrupt relationships to serve their own interests in money and power. What Jesus found there wasn't the sacred reverence of worship but a marketplace. According to the late William Barclay, a Scottish New Testament scholar, "it was a rampant and shameless social injustice—and what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion."²

In a moment, Jesus made a whip of cords, and drove them from the temple. He also overturned the tables of the money changers. Have you ever thought of Jesus being that angry and violent? Jesus shouted out, "Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!" Regrettably, in Jesus' eyes, the temple in Jerusalem lost its fundamental mission and function.

When Jesus drove out the merchants and money exchangers with a whip, people in the temple were upset. They asked him to prove his authority to rebuke them in such a rude and harsh way. Jesus answered, "Tear down this temple and in three days I will raise it up." "What? Are you kidding? It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you're saying you would rebuild it in three days?"

² William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*.

The *Gospel of John* explains that the temple Jesus spoke of was his body. In other words, Jesus' action in *John* was very symbolic. Jesus' answer predicted his own passion, death, and resurrection. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus claimed that his body would be destroyed and raised again in three days.

To me, the phrase "in three days" is a symbol of hope. Those last three days are the climax of Lent in which Jesus Christ suffered, died, and rose again. During Holy Week, we remember and relive the fellowship meal with the disciples on Thursday evening. On Friday, we recall the crucifixion and death of Christ that would eventually lead to Easter Alleluia and God's new creation. The Great Three Days is also an invitation for us to wake up, repent, and be ready to greet the risen Christ, attentively listening to God's voice: "You are the beloved." "When you are living or dying, you are in my eternal embrace." "I love you so much!"

As we continue our Lenten journey, we, members of the body of Christ, are called to ground ourselves in God, and to become a new temple, a sanctuary where God dwells. We can do that not because we are perfect, but because we are forgiven. Because we are in the power of God and in the presence of the risen Christ who makes us and the whole world into the temple of God.

I would like to conclude today's sermon with a hymn lyric. The hymn title is "Sanctuary." (TFWS 2164)

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,

pure and holy, tried and true.

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,

pure and holy, tried and true.

With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you.

As we long for God's loving and cleansing touch, I believe God will change our hearts, wipe away our sins, and heal us. As we continue to walk with Jesus, following God's leading in this Lenten season, God will come and renew us to become a healthy, disciple-making congregation. And all God's people say, Amen!