

## MAD

John 2:13-25

Third Sunday in Lent (Series B)

March 4, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for this Third Sunday after Lent comes from *The Gospel According to John*, chapter 2, verses 13 through 25. It is on page 751 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus gets mad. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From John 2, beginning at verse 13, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. <sup>15</sup> And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

<sup>18</sup> So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking about the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> When therefore 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.

<sup>23</sup> Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people <sup>25</sup> and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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Jesus goes from being the life of the party to a troublemaker. This episode at the temple in Jerusalem apparently happens just a short while after the wedding in Cana, where Jesus turned about a hundred and fifty gallons of water into really great wine (2:1-12). Okay, maybe he wasn't exactly the life of the party, at least not publicly; only a few people knew where the wine came from. But Jesus certainly enabled the party to keep rockin' long after it should have burned out. It was a really cool miracle. In addition to signaling the arrival of the messianic kingdom, which was the main thing, it was also just a really nice gesture. Jesus comes across as a really nice and humble guy. He comes across as the kind of guy who will do something really, really nice for you without expecting any kind of thanks or even letting you know he did it. Both the groom and the master of the feast had no idea Jesus had done this for them. Only a few people knew the secret, and to them, Jesus comes across as really, really nice.

But then, within what seems like about a week or so, Jesus appears at the temple in Jerusalem and it's no more Mr. Nice Guy. He comes across as downright mad. And I mean "mad" in two ways. First, he's just plain angry. And, second, he sounds crazy, like a mad scientist or a mad hatter who's been exposed to too much mercury.

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First, Jesus gets really mad in the angry sort of way. There were merchants in the temple selling various animals for sacrifices—oxen, sheep, and pigeons. These were the common animals that people would need for sacrifices. The people of Israel were required to make sacrifices for various sins or even just life events, like having a baby. So it kind of seems like a neat service to have these animals available for sale there. You didn't have to buy a sheep in Galilee and then walk it all the way to Jerusalem. It saved some hassle. So it was convenient to have them for sale at the temple.

But it doesn't seem like the merchants were doing this out of the goodness of their hearts. I imagine the prices at the temple were probably a bit higher than if you went to the local farmer's market. Business is all about location. It's kind of like when you go to a baseball game, and they won't let you bring your own food in, but they'll gladly sell you a hotdog for eight dollars. It almost makes you want to flip over the hotdog cart.

So the merchants were probably taking advantage of the travelers, and they were certainly using the sacred worship of the temple as a means for greedy financial gain. This is what drove Jesus mad, and this is why Jesus drove the merchants and their animals out of the temple.

And I kind of wonder what the ordinary people thought. They still needed to make a sacrifice. If they just walked down from Galilee, hoping to buy a sheep at the temple, they were in big trouble. "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb. 9:22). Jesus didn't just ruin the merchants day; he disrupted the entire worship of the temple. He prevented the sacrifices from happening, along with the forgiveness they promised. But Jesus had a plan for that, so he drove the merchants away.

And there were money changers there too. There was a yearly temple tax, which the Jews had to pay for the upkeep of the temple (Ex. 30:13). The tax itself wasn't the problem. Jesus was okay with taxes. The money changers were the problem. The tax had to be a certain coin—a half shekel. And it couldn't have the image of Caesar on it either. That would have been considered a violation of the First Commandment. But many of the Jews who travelled to Jerusalem didn't live in places where the right coin was readily available, so for the convenience of all the travelers, there were bankers at the temple who would gladly exchange your money ... for a price of course. And this was the problem. Greedy bankers and merchants were turning Jesus' Father's house into a house of trade.

Kind of like Charlie Brown in that Christmas special, it's all the commercialism that drove Jesus mad. And this was the sort of thing that drove Martin Luther crazy during the Reformation—the selling of indulgences, where, for a price, you could purchase the forgiveness of sins.

Financial gain has always been a special temptation in the Church. You see those TV preachers who ask you to sow a seed of faith by sending them money. That's a scam. And when Jesus returns in judgement I think he'll flip over the tables of the Christian publishing houses and record producers. And I know that not all of them are bad; some of them are very good. And when someone devotes their career to producing good Christian material, they should be

paid fairly. There's nothing wrong with that. But they also face a serious temptation, because it turns out that bad doctrine and shallow music that sounds just like secular love songs sells really, really well. Good doctrine and substantial Christian music just doesn't sell nearly as well, because it's hard to get people to pay for a message they don't want to hear. You don't hear very many songs that begin with the words, "We poor sinners," or something like that. That's because it doesn't sell.

This commercialization of worship is what infuriated Jesus. And so we see a side of Jesus that didn't make it into the caricature. If you want a Jesus who's just kind of an "aww shucks" nice guy, then I have bad news for you: The real Jesus isn't that guy. But if you think Jesus meek and mild is kind of boring, then I have good news for you: Jesus is way more interesting than that. In violation of the "Jesus: meek and mild" idea, one Christian author has labeled Jesus "Mean and Wild" (Mark Galli). And he's kind of right. Jesus is the kind of guy who has no reservations about offending people. Now, he's not *always* mean. Jesus does not treat all people equally. To the broken hearted and downtrodden, Jesus is consistently gentle and kind. To those who are burdened by the weight of sin or victimized by some other kind of oppressor, Jesus is meek and mild. But to the victimizers, the proud, or those who just enjoy their sins, Jesus is more often mean and wild. He says and does things that we generally don't consider to be very pious.

And let me remind you, this does not give us the right to act the way Jesus does. Jesus is the judge of all mankind. We are not. We are still required to live according to the commandments that God gives for sinful humans to follow. So we should resist the temptations of table flipping and name calling. Righteous indignation is hard to practice when we're not really righteous.

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And then, after Jesus gets "angry" mad, he says something that sounds "crazy" mad. The Jews are thinking, *Who does this guy think he is, coming in here, flipping over tables and cracking whips?* Actually, they didn't have to wonder. Jesus told them exactly who he thinks he is when he said, "**Do not make my Father's house a house of trade**" (2:16). And notice this: he didn't refer to God as "*Our Father*," like he taught us to do in the Lord's Prayer. He referred to God as *his Father*, as if Jesus is the only Son of God.

So the Jews wanted some proof, because that's a pretty bold claim. They said, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" (2:18). The idea is, *Okay, if you're going to flip tables, crack whips, and claim to be the Son of God, you're going to have to give us some justification for your actions and words.*

So Jesus offers them a sign: "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up**" (2:19). And this statement is really the key to the whole text, even though no one there had any idea what in the world Jesus was talking about, at least not yet. So this, along with the whole Son of God thing, is what Jesus said that made him sound mad in the brain cells.

From the perspective of the Jews, this was just plain nuts. It had taken forty-six years to build that temple, and the work was still ongoing.

The building they were standing in is what we refer to as Herod's temple. Herod began renovation of the Second Temple around 20 BC. And this was really the third attempt to build a temple that would stand the test of time. The first temple—King Solomon's temple—was built around 960 BC, and it stood until 586 BC when it was destroyed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Then, when the Jews returned from their captivity in Babylon, they rebuilt the

temple. This Second Temple was completed around 516 BC, but it apparently wasn't that great (Hag. 2:3). So several centuries later, King Herod began a major renovation of it, which basically involved rebuilding the whole thing one stone at a time. And this was the temple Jesus was standing in when he said, "**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**"

Later, when Jesus was on trial, his accusers twisted these words to paint Jesus as a rebel, saying that *he* would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61).

But Jesus never said *he* would destroy the temple. What he actually said was that *these Jews* would destroy the temple. Now this is just crazy. This would be like someone telling us that we're going to burn down our own church in hate. That's just ridiculous. And not only that, but this lunatic is going to rebuild it *by himself* in three days. That's what the Jews heard. This crazy guy in temple was telling them that they were going to destroy the temple, and he was going to rebuild it in three days. This guy must be mad in the head.

But he wasn't. Jesus knew exactly what he was talking about. Everything he said came to pass. But here's the thing: Jesus was the only person who knew what he was talking about. His disciples figured it out later, after these things came to pass. But at the time, Jesus was the only person who knew what Jesus was talking about.

Jesus was not talking about Herod's temple. He was not talking about some temple that would go through cycle after cycle of being built, destroyed, rebuilt, run down, rebuilt, and destroyed again. Jesus was talking about a temple that would be destroyed, rebuilt in three days, and then live forever without destruction or decay. He was talking about the temple of his own body. This was the temple that these Jews, who thought they were zealous for the temple, would murder. But Jesus would rebuild it in his resurrection from the dead on the third day. And by this he would accomplish salvation for the entire world and establish a temple where all people of all nations and tribes and languages would have access to the one true God.

So I hope you see how crazy this sounded to the Jews, but I hope you also see that it was all true, down to the letter. The whole thing about them destroying their own temple, and the whole thing about Jesus rebuilding it: it was all true, and it all came to pass.

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The ultimate sign that would reveal Jesus as the Son of God was his resurrection from the dead. He would allow his countrymen to hand him over to the Romans. The temple of his body, in which the whole fullness of God dwelt, was destroyed, and it was rebuilt on the third day.

This is his sign. This is his proof that he is who he says he is. These Jews will kill him, and he will rise again from the dead. And perhaps the most amazing thing is that he doesn't come back from the dead to exact vengeance. He comes back from the dead as a temple through whom all who trust in him—even those who murdered him—will have free and safe and peaceful access to God the Father.

And so it really doesn't matter if Jesus drives all the animals out of the temple, because they're not necessary anymore. Jesus himself is the sacrifice. He's the temple. He's the sacrifice. He's the everything.

Jesus is your access to the Father. That's what the temple idea was all about. The temple was the place where God dwelt among his people. But now God has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the temple, and through him we have access to the Father. But access to the Father doesn't really help anything if we are condemned on account of our sin. So Jesus is also the sacrifice. Instead of making a sacrifice in the building of the temple, the true temple,

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Jesus Christ, is sacrificed once for all, for all the sins of the world. Through this temple we have access, and not just any kind of access, we have peaceful access to God the Father through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.