

Lent 3B John 2:13-22

Many of us feel that our lives are out of control. Hurried and hectic, frantic and frenzied, busy. This is the way we describe the craziness of our daily lives. I sometimes wonder if any of us have thought: “This is not how I intended to live my life.”

One advantage of being in your 60’s (and there are not many) is that you remember a significant time before personal computers and mobile phones. I remember running to the landline telephone which was installed in our house in 1974 to pick it up knowing it was a friend, relative or trusted person. It usually rang three or four times a day on the weekend and once a day on weekdays. I have seen in my lifetime along with obvious utility- a hope that modern technology will provide our salvation. But often, the very technology we depend on to simplify life does just the exact opposite — it complicates life and enslaves us. For example, the mobile phone meant to give us freedom instead ties us to work and constant unsolicited phone calls like some unseen umbilical cord or hard wired antennae stuck to our head or ears. The lap top computer designed to allow us to work wherever we like, often means that we work wherever we are. Even e-mail, intended to speed communication, is not without its problems with face to face discussion being so much better. Oftentimes, the source of our craziness is the very technology we once believed could save us. I watch people walking up and down High St talking to themselves, which not so long ago was seen as the first sign of insanity! Sometimes walking around the City it reminds me of what I think ancient Rome’s slave market was like with slaves shackled- now shackled to mobile phones and the internet.

But at other times, the chaos of life is of our own making, and we have no one to blame but ourselves. We want a nicer home with a bigger yard so we move farther out, thereby increasing our daily commute. We want our children to be well-rounded so we sign them up for scouts, Aus Kick, Little Aths, the school band, dance classes but what we lose is the dinner hour as we wolf down our food and then pile into the car to get to practice on time- usually late. We turn up at a community meeting usually late-wanting to get involved, but grow resentful when they ask us to chair the next fund-raiser. We say we are too busy to take on a big commitment at Church. There are only so many hours in a day, and our time is no longer our own. Do we even have time to think “This is not how I intended to live my life.”

The Christian faith offers us a remedy for the craziness of life, and the season of Lent lies at the heart of it. Lent is the forty-day season of the church year, which extends from Ash Wednesday to the Saturday just before Easter (not counting Sundays). Lent is patterned after the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness at the start of his public ministry, as well as after the forty years the people of Israel wandered through the wilderness until they arrived at the Promised Land. As such, Lent is a time to ponder the profound issues of life and faith, to look into the very depth of our own soul, to examine our priorities and commitments, to come to terms with our own mortality, to get in touch with the chaotic wilderness of our own life, and then resolve to begin to do things differently.

Here are some questions to ponder during Lent: If you had to bet everything you have on whether there is a God or whether there isn’t, which side would get your money and why? If you had only one last message to leave to a handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in 25 words or less? If this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?

Having heard the gospel this morning let me introduce the words from St Paul “...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

The key to our Gospel reading for this Third Sunday in Lent is the repetition of the idea concerning belief. St John forces people if they are interested to confront what they believe, or do not believe, and help them find the Gospel that is Jesus Christ. That is always John's theme. In fact it is so important that he says in John 20:31, "...these (words) are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name."

St John discovered that the very idea that Jesus lives in us is enough to make us want to get up and tell anyone who will listen all about him. I guess you can say that I myself am doing that very thing, right now!

St John records the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The buying and selling of animals in and around the temple was common practice. The activity was probably seen as a convenience for the pilgrims who came to the Holy City for Passover. But as is often the case with unsupervised business, abuses developed, and the people who were the consumers became the consumed! With almighty money to be made, worship of Almighty God would soon take a backseat. It always happens this way if we allow it.

It is likely that Jesus did not protest the use of the temple for sacrifice as it did help the pilgrims to be able to make a proper sacrifice. However he was angry with the way in which it was being achieved. He was infuriated that the traders who were operating in the temple were more concerned with profit than with the reason they had been allowed to do business there in the first place. This was the temple of God and as such it deserved better attention and respect. For the better part of his life, Jesus had been to the temple and watched those people pollute the house of God in the name of the almighty dollar instead of the almighty God. He was furious at their disrespect and self interest. He was disgusted that the temple floor was soiled with animal faeces and the smell of urine burned his nostrils. This was the place where people came to worship God, it was for them and for Jesus, God's house. The sin of the moneychangers and the worship of the almighty dollar by those men broke his heart. So Jesus decided it was time for someone to clean the place up, and he drove them back out into the gutters where they came from.

In an interesting use of words, St John says that his disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me" Jesus showed forth his zeal (John 2:17). And just what is zeal? Zeal is passion, it is love on fire. It is a consuming dedication to a purpose. Jesus was passionate about God. He was passionate about purity. He was passionate about the things of God. Jesus was certain of one thing and that was that God doesn't come second to money.

What Jesus did at the temple may be a good instruction to us all as to what we have to do to prepare our temples to receive him. We ourselves must be sure to clean out the things that would hinder Jesus from entering into our hearts. We need to get the junk out and make room for the Spirit.

Some of us definitely need to cleanse the temple. We need to get busy and clear it out, drive out the cattle, upset the moneychangers, and shovel out the dirt and manure that is keeping Jesus from working effectively in our lives.

Lent is a time when we can and should examine our lives to see if there is any unclean thing there. Far too many of us go through our day, our week, our months, our years, and our lives, living the un-examined life- without examining ourselves and letting Jesus examine us through his word and sacrament. Our heart is like a garden and sin is as quick to pop up as the weeds. If we stop examining our lives and asking God to search us out, we will quickly be overcome with unwanted weeds that will distort our judgement and double down on our sin to become a veritable wild jungle. The Spirit doesn't dwell in dirty temples or wild jungles. There is no shortcut to being alive in God; it comes as you confess your sin in silence or to speak to another through confession. You

need to give Jesus time to open the door to your heart. Lent gently urges us to ask ourselves when was the last time we were free of the things of the world long enough to allow Jesus to purify and cleanse us?

You may believe in the forgiveness of sins, but belief alone will not be enough. You can believe in the forgiveness of sin, but the question is have you come to terms with the fact that sin has taken up residence in your life? The fact.

Have you surrendered, have you allowed Jesus to come in and do some cleaning? Have you let Jesus penetrate into our heart? Once again, Lent allows us a unique opportunity to ask the one who knew no sin, to take your sin away! Jesus wasn't crying in Gethsemane because of the pain, he wasn't crying because of the agony. He was torn because he knew he would take on all our sin.

Sisters and brothers in Christ if you have nailed your sin to the cross, the scriptures says that God casts it as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). Believe it, for that is a long way! That sin, that thing, whatever it is that keeps us from walking hand in hand with Jesus into the Lent and Easter journey is finally identified and removed. Jesus has cleared away all that keeps us from living in comfort with the Holy Spirit.

Reach out to Jesus and help him help you fill the cluttered spaces of your life and permeate those spaces with new life and new hope. When you do, you will begin to understand maybe for the first time that it is through the cross of Christ that the Holy Spirit fills you with the same zeal that filled our Lord. Allow that wonderful passion to grow within you. When you do, you will be able to walk into your future knowing that the Spirit of God dwells within you and you are once and forever the temple of God! Amen.

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