

## Sermon – 7 March 2021 (Third Sunday of Lent)

Rev. Jackie Bullen

### John 2. 13-22

In the Church of England, we have a particular attachment to buildings. So much of life happens within the walls of the parish church - baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, as well as worship. Even when people have moved away from where they grew up, there can be a special fondness for their home parish church.

Those feelings we have are just a small part of what the Jews felt towards their temple. This was the one and only, the special place in Jerusalem where God's presence was promised. To meet with God, you went up to the temple, and that's what the Jews did, three times a year for the festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles. These were special times, when they went to meet with God, to go to God's dwelling place.

In our reading today, we're told that the feast of Passover was at hand, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. When he gets to the temple, what does he find? A devout and praying people, meeting with their Maker? A crowd of awe-struck worshippers? Verse 14 tells us what he found. 'People selling cattle, sheep and doves, and the money-changers sitting there.'

In the place of prayer, he finds a market. Now, you know what comes next, but imagine that you're there. You just happen to have arrived in Jerusalem, and you see what takes place. Jesus makes a whip of cords, and drives the sellers out of the temple, with the sheep and cattle. Coins being poured out and rattling on the ground, as the tables are overturned. The dove sellers are told to get out, to take them away. It's not quite the picture we have of Jesus, is it?

Why does Jesus do this? Jesus cleanses the temple because it had been corrupted. What was God's house had become a marketplace, a house of trade. The place of prayer had become the place of money-making. The place where you sought God, had become the place where people were seeking their own profit. Jesus takes action to restore the purity and holiness of the temple. And as he does so, the disciples remember a portion of tonight's Psalm 69 - 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' They see the actions of Jesus promised centuries beforehand in David's Psalm.

Now so far in John's gospel, we've seen how everyone has responded well to Jesus. The first disciples are introduced to him by John the Baptist, and they follow him. They see Jesus' glory at the wedding at Cana where he turned the water into wine. But now, Jesus has opponents. Look at verse 18. 'So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' What right have

you to come and drive out the sellers? Who are you to come and upset the traders? Who do you think you are?

Jesus answers them in a way that makes them laugh. 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' So Jesus is standing in the temple, and they think he has gone mad. In fact, the scaffolding was probably still up in bits of the building. Look at what they say: 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' Forty-six years of building works, and Jesus thinks he can knock it down and build it again in three days? It would be impressive, but is that what Jesus means?

John tells us: 'But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.' Jesus says 'destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' He's not talking about the building he's standing in. He's talking about his body.

Now, sometimes you hear fitness fanatics talking about how your body is a temple, so you have to look after it, eat the right things etc. But what does Jesus mean?

Jesus is saying that he is the temple. Just as the Jerusalem temple was the place where God dwells, the place where you meet with God, so now Jesus is where God dwells, Jesus is the place where you meet with God. He's saying what John summarised in chapter one: 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory.' Explaining to us that to meet with God, we don't have to be in a special building.

Yes, we love our church building. Contractors are working inside the building on phase 1 of the project that has been planned for many years. It was 13 years ago that the church council originally voted to look at what might be possible and started to draw up plans. We had some money we were able to pledge to use for the project. Some gifted to the church especially for that purpose and some set aside by the church council. Hopefully you will have seen the progress reports in the Daily emails.

Soon we will be working hard to raise the funds to undertake phase 2 of the work. This is a great opportunity for us all to be involved with making our special building a safer, more accessible, sustainable, comfortable and welcoming space for the church family to meet in and for the community to enjoy too. Our building is important and the items which reflect our heritage and the memorials it contains have been carefully covered to keep them safe during the work. They will be not only be preserved, but made more accessible to visitors. This is good news.

But we must also remember that Jesus is the new temple and it is through him that we meet with God. Just think of the new Jerusalem, that John tells us about in Revelation. He gives us the grand tour of the city, telling us what he sees in it in chapters 21 and 22, but then he tells us what he does not see. 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.' (Rev 21:22)

We are ultimately called not to cling to a building but to come to Jesus. The temple Jesus speaks of stands forever - destroyed, yes on the cross, but raised on the third day. We can draw near at any time to meet with God, because God came near to us. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can dwell with God forever. What a privilege we have as we come to this temple, Jesus, to meet with the living God.