

Third Sunday in Lent

THE TEMPLE

John 2:13-22

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Analysis by Carolyn Schneider

2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15Making 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. 16He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22After 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.

DIAGNOSIS: "Violence in the Temple"

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *"Violence in the Temple" – View One*

If the events of John 2:13-22 happened in our own time, the newspaper headlines would undoubtedly read, "Violence in the

Temple,” referring to Jesus’ violence. Jesus had, after all, driven out with a whip the animals necessary for the sacrifices prescribed by the Law, and he had overturned the tables where money was changed from Roman coins to Jewish coins for the temple tax. The people present had no reason to doubt that what they were thinking and doing was anything but right. They must have been bewildered by such behavior. Perhaps they asked themselves, “Why is this person so angry at us? We are only living according to the custom that we believe has been blessed by God. This Jesus must be a crazed fanatic, a terrorist, attacking the very center of his own and our religious practice.”

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *“Violence in the Temple” – View Two*

Jesus, too, seems to have regarded the temple as a place of violence that had reached an unbearable pitch. From his point of view, the thousands of animals slaughtered during Passover died for no purpose but to feed those who were already rich and powerful. God’s essential Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments was a call to complete devotion of heart toward God and complete devotion of action for the good of the neighbor. But what kind of devotion toward God was it when religious leaders collaborated with the Roman Empire just to keep a small share of the power? Even in the temple the empire was accommodated as the money bearing the emperor’s image was conveniently exchanged. Meanwhile, what kind of devotion to the neighbor was it when the poor had to live with no influence under the Empire even as they expended their earnings on sacrifices and taxes to support the staff in the temple? Ultimately these bargains with the Empire would be no guarantee of safety, for the emperor was not the real God who loves the world. John’s first readers knew that the temple that had stood in Jesus’ time had been destroyed by the Roman Empire and still

lay in ruins after more than 20 years. Jesus was demonstrating that God had had enough.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *“Violence in the Temple” – View Three*

Not everyone was confused about what Jesus meant. The religious leaders in the temple understood him. They saw that his clearance of the temple was a provocation meant to draw attention to himself as the Messiah, the one who acts out the word of God in his life and leads God’s people into this new life of “grace and truth” (John 1:17). They asked him to prove that he had the right to exercise this role. Jesus’ answer was masked in wordplay, but showed that Jesus, too, knew exactly what was going on. The interlocutors were invested in the status quo and were not prepared to accept the Messiah no matter who the Messiah was. It was certain that they would kill Jesus. However, Jesus understood that his body was the new temple; God was no longer in the old temple. The proof of his identity would be that after he was killed, he would rise in three days. Yet, to violate this new temple of God is indeed a crime against God, subject to God’s judgment and punishment.

PROGNOSIS: The Temple Restored

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Temple Restored – View One*

The first chapter of John’s gospel is full of invitations to look at Jesus, and to “come and see” him and the place where he lives. (See, for example, John 1:38-39 and 46.) After watching Jesus clear the temple, one of the religious leaders, Nicodemus, did in fact come to see and converse with Jesus. They talked about how God’s Spirit gives birth to people who thereby share God’s own eternal life, for they become children of God, siblings of Jesus. They are the Father’s “house,” God’s family or dynasty, and zeal for them consumes Jesus. For their sake he

will do anything, even die bearing the charge of blasphemy, crimes against God and God's temple, for Jesus is confident that he himself is the living temple who gathers people into himself and carries them in life, through death, and on to resurrected life. Jesus' death in the temple of his body is the death of "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : The Temple Restored – View Two

"After [Jesus] 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" (John 2:22). Perhaps Nicodemus was among these followers, since, after Jesus' death, Nicodemus had gone to anoint the body of Jesus, thus acknowledging him as the Messiah, "the Anointed" (John 19:39-40 and 1:41). This believing is the midwife the Holy Spirit uses to bring God's children to life even in the bodies they already have. As those who live together no longer "in the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2), but in God's house, they share the zealous Spirit of Jesus for the well-being of all so that no one but the real God is worshiped and no sacrificial, old-temple bartering is necessary. Jesus himself has come as the Messiah who ends the corruption of God's people. God has provided the Lamb that no one needs to purchase for the sacrifice, and whose body is food for all. In this temple, life is raised up out of destruction.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : The Temple Restored – View Three

There may be those who benefit from the destruction of life and the enslavement of nations and people in poverty, and they will oppose the construction going on in the Temple of Jesus. They will accuse God's family of violence against the piety of power. "What sign can you show us for doing this?" they will ask. The

answer is the same sign that Jesus gave: the sign of his cross and of his resurrection. In this sign, you keep on. Even if you lose your life, this sign marks the house that cannot be demolished. Like the blood of the Passover Lamb on the doorposts and lintels, it means that no angel of death or insolent people can “have dominion over” you (Exodus 12:7 and 13; Psalm 19:13). There is one God and you all live in God’s Temple, the body of Christ, the Messiah.