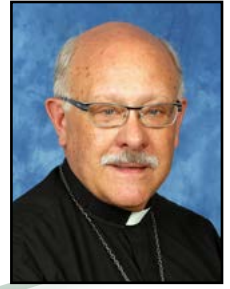




Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Third Sunday in Lent

March 4, 2018

A Matter of Convenience

John 2:13-22

"The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem..."

On this Sunday, we are in church. We are about what observant Christians do, they gather for worship. It was so in the life of Jesus.

As an observant Jew, his family kept a pattern of being at synagogue. There is little doubt that family devotion kept them tethered to the traditions of Judaism and the festivals (like Passover) that kept them within the framework of the first covenant.

We also know that their faith life was more than a matter of convenience. They had been to Temple (Recall when Jesus was lost and, then, found teaching the elders at 12 years of age?) And, from the narrative of John's Gospel, Jesus observed three Passovers at the Temple. (John 2, 6, and when brought for to religious trial before Annas chapters 18/19)

John recorded one Temple cleansing. (There was a second one recorded in the first three Gospels.) One writer calls it "Jesus' Whip Sermon" and it must have been quite an event!

The scene seems to be about religious life which involved fast talking (sales chat bidding for sacrifice) and easy living which seems to suggest a quick sacrifice ("get in, pay, pray/sacrifice, and go!") would become a matter of convenience and getting on with life.

Two noting's:

1. The Temple became a Mall, business was being done, money changed. Temple was not meant to be a bank or retail center. They were "in" the Temple doing what may have been done in the outer (Gentile) courts, but Passover was meant to be a discipline of following God and not as a quick service event! As in just let's get it over!
2. How could it have happened? Would the Temple police have let it happen? Would not the traders have resisted? After all, Jesus was a faithful observant at worship until the whip swept the tables. And there may have been other faithful who likely would have said, "It's about time!" And the coins scattered; animals suddenly free!

"Stop turning my Father's house into place of business." As if worship was preordered, fast worship, with no commitment to change!

The relational words change and pivot to a foundational teaching about MY FATHER'S HOUSE," a place of intimacy and worship reclaimed by the One who came from the Father, Jesus. And the disciples were beginning to get the connection!

Jewish people, instead of arresting them all, locking them up, asked for a sign. "Give a reason you are doing this action of protest."

For in a moment the "house" of God is resident in the body of the Son. For He is the in the dwelling place of the God that He calls "Father" as the Word made flesh. (John 1:14) "Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it right back up again."

The crowd is incredulous. They thought he was arrogant, I believe. I would have been too. Can you hear the sarcasm and unbelief?

"Ha, sure, been building this for forty-six years and you are going to put it back up in three days?"

John adds an edit and teaches that Jesus was thinking of His body.

Note, too, that twice the words instruct that Jesus' action and words were "remembered" and led them to a deepening faith, to be discipleFit, in sharing and in serving AFTER His resurrection.

It is Lent, a gift of time to reflect and to prepare again for as we walk together towards a time in human history when Jesus lived towards the Cross. In these past days, we have heard anew how the narrative of God becomes the story of our days too.

Taking time is not easy, in what one writer has coined as the Tyranny of Convenience. A culture where waiting is not our first choice: we pre-order for pickup, seek convenience in retailing of nearly everything, as in Amazon Prime, why wait for the book to arrive just download to your Kindle. Or, Quaker Quick Oats. Do we enjoy waiting in line? I am learning to!

Long ago we learned to read the One Minute Manager. And prefer auto-fill for our email; one-click, one stop, and plug and play

Convenience trumps work for any wait; I have seldom met a patient patient; we fear of missing out as time seems to fly. And it may have been that the first covenant people had to be kept to the 10 Commandments check-list to realize that community takes time to create and must be drawn close by boundaries of behavior in relationships. That which we tend to call "ethical behavior."

One of my teacher mentors once made the simple statement that if you keep the First Commandment, "No other gods before me," that the rest tend to follow. And that is the sense of our readings for this day ---

Remember, Trust, Follow.

✠ REMEMBER that God has a pathway to life, forgiveness, and service. Our lives are centered in the love that will never let us go. And the sign is the Cross.

When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, the grounds was and is to do this in remembrance of Him. The One whose love is boundless, the One who lived as we do and made our homelessness His home.

✠ TRUST that there is no convenient way to discipleship. But, to live into the mercy and peace of God in Christ guides us to avoid the paths of fast talk and easy living.

As Jesus walked the way of suffering, that same Lord walks with us into the places where we too suffer, even to the shadows of death and into eternal life. And the Cross is the Way --- and we forgive as we have been forgiven and love as we have been loved.

✠ FOLLOW. Discipleship leads to sharing and serving. This past week, my conversations here in this place and in the community most often centered in the ways we can live our faith in times when there is much anxiety, a undertone of fear, and the truth that most of us live a pace that is often unsustainable---the press of the work place, the academy, the social networking bind that sometimes hobbles as we try to keep up with it all.

One of our young students caught up with me sitting outside the Starbucks at Kelsey Creek; just sitting with nothing to read, nothing to respond to, and he said, "Hi Pastor, what are you doing?" I said, "Just sitting and watching and being quiet." He said, "Really?" And I said, "Want just sit here and do nothing with me?" And we did, for a time, until we had to go.

Something happened in that space. A quiet time of sharing about the day---not quick, not rushed, not moving into "busy time" and it seemed a little like a spiritual island. A convenient time to be...in Christ...a place to speak each other's name, a simple greeting, a sending, "Peace be with you, Shawn. And also with you, Pastor Jim."

Long question: "How is Lent going for you?" A reminder: Love God; Cling to the Cross and the forgiveness that clings to you; and remember and believe you are LOVED.

And our prayer---

*"MY HEART SHALL SING OF THE DAY YOUR BRING.
LET THE FIRES OF YOUR JUSTICE BURN
WIPE AWAY ALL TEARS, FOR THE DAWN DRAWS NEAR
AND THE WORLD IS ABOUT TO TURN."*

So, we pause, listening for the power of the Holy Spirit to slow us down, to listen, to learn, to dream, to be discipleFit. Amen!