



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
Pastor James Tiefel  
(262) 853-9723 (cell#)  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

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## The Fourth Sunday in Lent

March 14, 2021

### Craving for Saving

The Bible tells us that already at age 12 Jesus was eager to take up the cause and defend the honor of his Father. He was determined and dedicated to carry out his Father's will. Today's Gospel permits us to see another example of the Savior's zeal to carry out God's plan to save us and our world. We are encouraged by his love for us and motivated to be zealous for salvation.

<b>First Reading</b>	<b>Exodus 20:1-17</b> <i>In order to bless us, God demands our respect.</i>
<b>Second Reading</b>	<b>1 Corinthians 1:18-25</b> <i>The wisdom of God is rejected by the world.</i>
<b>Gospel</b>	<b>John 2:13-22</b> <i>Jesus shows his zeal to do his Father's will.</i>
<b>Sermon</b>	<b>John 2:13-22</b>

**Introduction:** There is nothing that we know in our religious experience which is like what the temple was to the Jews who lived when Jesus lived. In our experience God shows us who he by showing us Christ and he does that through the Word and the sacraments. Whether you're in a building made of mud in Africa or a brick church in Mequon or a grand cathedral in a great city, the house of God does the same thing: It reveals the face of God in the Word and the sacraments.

Everything was different in Israel. In Israel there was no temple east or temple west or temple south. There was one temple and it stood on Mt. Moriah in Jerusalem. King Solomon built the first temple and it was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The Babylonians destroyed Solomon's temple 400 years later, but the Jews eventually rebuilt it, although not nearly as large or as fancy. Along came King Herod. The Jews hated Herod, but they worked out a deal with him to rebuild again: he would put up the money and they would do the work. Together they put up the largest sacred compound ever built. It was larger than Solomon's temple and far more elaborate. It was finished about a decade before Jesus was born and its west wall is still standing today.

For Jews, there was more to the temple than its size and its grandeur. The temple was the center of their religious lives. The priesthood functioned only at the temple and the priests wore their symbolic vestments only at the temple. Priests offered sacrifices only at the temple and they celebrated the great festivals only at the temple. In sight and sound and symbol the temple was the place where God revealed himself. And this is the place where Jesus showed up on a spring day in the first year of his

ministry. By what he did and by what he said, you might say Jesus brought the house down—but nobody was applauding and no one gave him a standing ovation.

We're going to visit the temple this morning. We're not Jews and the temple means nothing to us. But we're going to see Jesus at the temple. We're going to see how determined and dedicated he was to do what God wanted him to do. And as we watch and listen we can imitate him and learn from him. So let's walk with Jesus this morning as he visits the temple and watch him...

### Bringing the House Down

1. We're in year one of Jesus' three-year ministry, and things are still pretty quiet. He's still spending most of his time at home in Galilee. No one knew much about him especially in the capital city. So John tells what happened next: **When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.** Not unusual. Jesus did this every year. He got into town and headed for the temple, just like everybody else. **In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.** Again, not unusual. Part of the temple ritual was to sacrifice animals. If you came from out of town you weren't going to carry a sheep in your suitcase, so you had to buy one when you got there. Perfectly legit. You also had to pay the annual temple tax with a special temple coin. Currency exchange happens all over the world, even today. Perfectly legit. Here was the first problem: Most of the bankers and most of the farmers were cheats who over-priced and took advantage of people, Here was the second: They all set up shops inside the temple. The shouts of the salesmen were louder than the singing of the psalms and the temple smelled like a barnyard.

Jesus was absolutely furious; he had a right to be furious. **So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"** What upset Jesus was that these crooks—to say nothing of the temple officials who should have thrown them out long ago—that they had all lost sight of the real purpose of the temple. Jesus knew what God's law said--we heard it today in the First Reading: **You shall have no other gods before me,** but the sellers and the temple leaders made a god out of profits. **You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,** but they were using the name of God to justify their cheating. **Remember the Sabbath by keeping it holy,** but they were interrupting and interfering with the people's worship at the greatest Sabbath of the year. They had turned a building that was intended to be the house of God and a house of prayer for all people into a marketplace and a county fair. The place God had designed to bring rest and peace to people they turned into a place for profit and proceeds for themselves.

I'm guessing the disciples were pretty shocked and probably embarrassed. But then they remembered a Bible passage from Psalm 69: **Zeal for your house will consume me.** They were learning little by little that more than anything else Jesus cared about people. He had a craving for people to know God, to trust God's forgiveness and love and patience and promises. The sellers had turned the people away from God, and Jesus was ready to overturn and overthrow everything that turned people away from God. If that desire meant cleansing the temple, so be it. Jesus was bringing down the house in Jerusalem to bring God and people together.

Now nobody here needs to make any whips to cleanse the church bazaars and rummage sales, but Jesus is making a point we need to hear. Jesus understood what the real purpose of the temple was and he was passionate to preserve it. We need to understand that too. It's easy for us to lose sight of that; we may

have more trouble with that than others. We all want to preserve the heritage of this congregation; for some of us it's the only church we've ever known. Some of our closest friends belong here, and we look forward to seeing them each week. We care about keeping the place up and maintaining our property. We want people to be active and involved. All of those are legitimate goals and flow from Christian love. But the most important task our church has, the most important thing we do, is to guard and guarantee that this church is a place where we and others find the love of God in Christ. The healing of hearts is more important than our heritage. The forgiveness of sins is more important than our friendships. The actions of God are more important than the activity of people and the miracles in water and bread and wine are more important than maintenance. Jesus used a whip to demonstrate that he was dedicated and determined to do his Father's will. We don't need a whip, but we might hope that it can be said of us: **"Zeal for God's house consumes them."**

2. The Jewish leaders didn't get angry with Jesus. They probably realized he had a right to deal with the temple cheats. But they were interested. **The Jews then responded to him, What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?** Jesus answered in a very, very strange way: **Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.**" Now remember what I told you about Herod's temple at the beginning of this sermon and you can understand why they responded the way they did. **"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"** From what John tells us the disciples were just as shocked. What in all the world? The temple area was as big as 30 soccer fields. It was nine stories tall and had walls that were 16' thick. It took years to build. Jesus could tear it down and rebuild it in three days? Is Jesus crazy? Jesus didn't say a word, but John explains: **The temple he had spoken about was his body.** Oh, there it is. Destroy this temple, this person, this body, destroy me and in three days I will rise again. Jesus wasn't talking about Mt. Moriah at all; he was talking about Mt. Calvary. He wasn't talking about where God used to reveal his love—in a building. He was talking about where God was now revealing his love—in his Son. Jesus wasn't interested in Herod's temple at all. When Jesus died, the great veil in the temple, the veil that separated the high priest from the people, the veil that proclaimed that people could not approach God on their own, that veil was torn in half from top to bottom. The entire purpose of the temple collapsed and crumbled when Jesus rose from his grave. The temple stood for 40 more years until the Roman general Titus destroyed it, but on Good Friday and Easter Sunday Jesus was bringing that house down forever!

John finishes the story: **After Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.** You and I know what those disciples didn't know and maybe couldn't know on that day in Jerusalem. We know that Christianity in general and our Christian faith in particular rests on the reality that Jesus Christ was conceived, born, lived, suffered, died, rose, and ascended and that this life, death, and resurrection saved us from the tragedy of sin and the horror of hell. We will never find life with God or peace with God or hope in God just by coming to church or by singing our songs or giving our money or maintaining our cemetery. No amount of effort on our part can ever give us life and peace. So this house of God means something only when it proclaims to us the love of God in Christ, only when sins are confessed and absolved, only when the gospel is preached and praised, and only when water creates faith and bread and wine give us the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

The temple in Jerusalem was a mighty and magnificent structure. Before Titus burned it down, he called it "the greatest glory of human creation." And then he brought the house down and it was never rebuilt. No temple here, no gold or silver, no massive stones. But the gospel is here and the good news about Jesus will never come down. Amen.