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Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Not Mad *at* You – Mad *for* You”

Text: John 2:13-22; Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:22-25

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We see a very different side of Jesus in the Holy Gospel for today. A little “March madness” if you will. He is overturning tables and scattering money. He makes a whip out of cords and drives both men and animals from the Temple. . . . *This is not the Jesus we’re used to!* It is not the cute, cuddly Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger. It is not the Jesus who dines with tax collectors and sinners, loves wayward disciples, and warmly touches untouchable lepers. But even so, this is not a different Jesus. This is not Jesus acting out of character. This is Jesus *still* acting in love and compassion. Jesus caring for His Bride, the Church. Perhaps today it would be called “tough love.” But it is love. Love that cannot stand idly by, but must act. Love that in its zeal is all consuming.

“His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”

But it wasn’t the house, the Temple itself, that was so important. God had been satisfied with a traveling tent, the Tabernacle. It was what took place at the Temple that was so important. It was the place of the shedding of blood. It was the place where God and man were reconciled. It was where sin was dealt with and forgiveness given. A place of faith in the promises of God. . . . But that’s exactly what wasn’t being taken seriously anymore. The House of God, which was supposed to be a house of prayer, a house of faith and forgiveness, a house of holiness, had been turned into “TempleMart.” What had started out with good intentions – providing sacrificial animals for traveling pilgrims who couldn’t bring them themselves – had turned into doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. Christ’s Bride, His Church, His people, weren’t being taken care of anymore. Forgiveness had been turned into big business, and God’s love and grace had been whittled and belittled down to a transaction. Maybe you could even charge your sacrifice on your “Master’s Card!”

But what had gotten lost in the shuffle was the most important thing of all. The business of God had replaced the forgiveness of God. And it sometimes happens in our lives as well. When things get busy, when things get hectic, when God gets lost in the shuffle, or

(maybe even worse!) when He becomes just one more thing to check off on our to do lists! Oh, we may still come to church, we may still pray, we may still read His Word – but are we doing the right things for the wrong reasons? Does the *business* of God replace the forgiveness of God? Have we whittled and belittled our Lord and His forgiveness down to a transaction? It's easy for us to look back to what was happening at the Temple and think, "*Yeah, they got what was coming to them!*" (Those hard-headed, ungrateful sinners!) But what about you and me? Do we fall into the same trap? Does God get lost in the shuffle? Does God become what *we* do instead of what *He* does?

And so maybe we need a little "March madness" in our own hearts! A little Lenten turning over of the tables in our hearts, and a driving out of the beasts of sin that have settled in and made themselves at home in us. We need *the love and compassion of God* that will not let us go our own way; that will not let us stay in our sin and die. We need *the love and compassion of God* that gives the Law, the Ten Commandments, to reveal the stench of our sin in order to cleanse the tainted temples of our hearts. We need *the love and compassion of God* that cuts in order to heal; that kills in order to make alive; that dies in order to rise to life again. We need *the love and compassion of God* that caused Him to send His Son into our sin-filled world. We need *the love and compassion of God* that consumes Jesus with zeal for the Temple, because He is consumed with zeal **for you**. We need *the love and compassion of God* that will drive us to repentance.

And thank God we have such a God! Who is completely consumed **with you**. With your forgiveness and reconciliation. Who cares about *everything* – even the details of your life. Who cares about how you live. Who cares about the things you do. Who cares when He sees you wandering away. Who cares when He sees you hurting yourself in things that may seem harmless. Who cares so much . . . and maybe, in the opinion of some, cares too much. Like when He steps in to do something about it.

But it is that very stepping in that not only works in our hearts and lives to drive us to repentance, but that has provided a new Temple. A *new* Temple that has taken the place of the old one. A *new* Temple that isn't anchored in Jerusalem. A *new* place where God dwells with His people – not in stone, but in flesh and bone. And so a *new* place where God and man are brought back together again; where forgiveness takes place. The new Temple of which Jesus said, "***Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up.***" And it was. For that dwelling of God, destroyed on the cross, was raised up three days later, which means that while the other Temple, the old Temple, is long gone, this new Temple is still with us. And will always be with us. With us in love and compassion. To care, forgive, teach, lead, heal, speak, cleanse, wash, and feed. Here to care for His Bride, His Church. Still completely consumed by love for you.

That is the Jesus who walked into the Temple that Passover in Jerusalem. The Lamb of

God who rendered all other sacrificial lambs obsolete. The One upon whom the whip of hate and scorn lashed down. The One who redeemed us *not with gold or silver, but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death*. And so the One consumed with us is consumed by our sin on the cross – and yet He is not consumed, but risen and lives to give forgiveness. And the One consumed with us is consumed by our death in His death – and yet He is not consumed, but risen and lives to give life. And the One consumed with us is now consumed by us, as He gives us here His body to eat and His blood to drink – and yet He is not consumed, but risen and lives in us. His life into our life and our life into His life. All to one end: that we might live with Him forever. That as He dwells with us here in our home, we too might dwell with Him there in His home.

And that was always the plan. That when the new Temple came to Jerusalem, the old Temple would pass away. That *Christ be Made the Sure Foundation* (HS #865) – of both our lives here, and our lives forever.

And so as St. Paul wrote, ***we preach Christ crucified***. Not a God we can deal with. Not a God who puts up with us. Not a God who is content to let us go our own ways, who winks at our indiscretions, who cuts us a little slack. No. But a God who one Passover wreaked a little “March madness” – first in the Temple, and then on the cross. And who in so doing, conquered sin, death, and hell. Who in so doing redeemed us as His own. For He is a God who could not stand idly by, and who still can’t. But in love and compassion, comes to us. Not mad at you, but mad **for you**.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord unto everlasting life. Amen.