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Lent 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A New Temple, A New Life”

Text: John 2:13-22; Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

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 side of Him that we are, perhaps, not used to and maybe, not altogether comfortable with. For today, He is not *the [Christmas] babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger*, but a man overturning tables and scattering money. Today, He is not the Epiphany Jesus who dines with tax collectors and sinners, loves wayward disciples, and warmly touches untouchable lepers, but is chasing men and animals from the Temple. Today, He is not the Jesus on the *receiving* end of the whip, but on the *giving* end.

But even so, this is not a different Jesus, nor Jesus acting out of character. This is Jesus still acting, same as always, *in love and compassion*. Jesus acting in love to care for His Bride, the Church, with a love that cannot stand idly by, but must act. A love that in its zeal is all consuming. A love for His Father and for you.

John and the other disciples remembered the Psalm which spoke of this: **“Zeal for your house has consumed me.”** We also sang that in the Introit today. But realize that it wasn’t the house, the Temple building itself, that was so important. God had been satisfied with a traveling tent, the Tabernacle, for His house and never asked for another to be built. Rather, *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. A place where God gifted His people with Himself.

But that’s exactly what wasn’t being taken seriously anymore. Things in the Temple had been turned upside down long before Jesus got there that day. For God’s house, which was supposed to be a house of prayer, a house of faith and forgiveness, a house of holiness, had been turned **into a house of trade**. Oh, it had all probably started out with good intentions – providing sacrificial animals for traveling pilgrims who couldn’t bring them themselves – but had taken on a life of its own, and 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

business, and God's love and grace had been reduced to a transaction.

Now there's an important truth it would be well for us to learn and remember from what developed at the Temple in Jesus' day - that what you **do** affects what you **believe**. Or, to put that in a more theological way, doctrine (what you believe) and practice (what you do) go together. So when you start conducting business in the Temple (practice) you soon begin to think of God in business terms (doctrine). When you start buying animals, you may soon start to think in terms of buying forgiveness. And while everything may *look* good and right and upstanding on the outside (what you do), on the inside, in the heart (what you believe), everything is wrong.

That danger is still very real for us today as well. In the church, and in our lives. It is very dangerous to think that I can live however I want and as long as I believe the right thing, I'll be okay. Because if you live as if God did not matter and as if you mattered most, you know what will happen? Pretty soon God will not matter. If you live as if the people around you don't matter, pretty soon they won't. What we **do** affects what we **believe**. That's why the church has always been careful with her liturgy and practices - what we do here, affects what we believe *in here*, in our hearts.

And the opposite is true also: what we believe will affect what we do. Because what lives in your head and in your heart will work itself out in your actions. Our liturgy and our lives not only **affect** what we believe, they also **reflect** what we believe. And so if we believe Christ is truly present here in His house, we will act like it. And if Christ matters to us in our lives, we will live like it.

But when you take a look - at your life and at your heart - what do you see? What does your self-examination show? Maybe you and I haven't been selling animals in the Temple lately, but have we been bargaining with God in different ways? Confessing one truth but living another? Negotiating with Him to try to hang onto some of our pet sins? Trying to deal with Him by doing some good deeds to make up for our bad deeds? Do we perhaps try to manage our relationship with God instead of letting God's love have His way with us?

So maybe we need 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. Yes, we need the love and compassion of a 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 a 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 a God that cuts in order to heal; that kills in order to make alive. We need the love and compassion of a God that caused Him to send His Son into our

sin-filled world. We need the love and compassion of a God that consumes Jesus with zeal for the Temple, because He is consumed with zeal for you. We need the love and compassion of a 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 to you. 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 for us 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 in human flesh and blood. 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 stone Temple, is long gone, the new flesh and bone Temple of Jesus 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* (Small Catechism, explanation of the Second Article).

And so the One consumed with us is consumed by our sin on the cross – and yet He is not consumed, but risen and now 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 now 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 now 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 is why, as St. Paul wrote, **we preach Christ crucified.** *Not* a God we can deal with or manage. *Not* a God who puts up with us. *Not* a God who is content to let us go our own ways, to define our own truth, who winks at our indiscretions, or who cuts us a little slack. **No.** But a God who cares. Who put His love into action, and still does. Who came to cleanse us from our sin and redeem 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. That you now be His Temple. His Temple cleansed in forgiveness, raised to a new life, and in which and through which He lives and works for the life of the world. *May God bestow on us such grace.*

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 faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.