

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Fifth Sunday After Epiphany, February 10, 2019

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 16, 9:5, 275, 341, 341:5.

Lessons: 1 Kings 8:1-30, Acts 5:25-42, Luke 2:39-52.

Sermon Text: John 2:13-25.

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Beloved in Christ our only Savior:

There are many things the Bible tells us about Jesus. We can learn about Jesus, for example, from the names given to him. He is called **“Alpha and Omega”** Rev. 1:8; **“The King of kings and Lord of lords”** I Tim. 6:15; **“the Christ of God”** Luke 9:20; **“the true God and eternal life”** I John 5:20; **“Immanuel”** Is. 7:14; **“Lamb of God”** John 1:29; **“Lord of glory”** I Cor. 2:8; **“the LORD our Righteousness”** Jer. 23:6; **“Prince of Peace”** Is. 9:6; **“the Resurrection and the Life”** John 11:25; **“Savior of the world”** I John 4:14; and **“the Son of the Highest.”** Luke 1:32 One thing he is not called is “sweet Jesus,” as he is addressed in a sentimental Gospel song. The Bible speaks of Jesus’ sinlessness, his obedience and faithfulness, his love and compassion, his meekness and patience in suffering, but it does not speak of him as being sweet. That is a sickly sentimental way of referring to Jesus which is not in accord with what the Bible teaches of him.

The Lord Jesus, contrary to the opinion of some, did not go about on this earth always with a smile on his face. The Lord is holy and he hates what is evil. The psalmist says: **“You hate all who do wrong.”** 5:5 So also our Savior was filled with holy indignation against the hypocrisy of the Jewish religious leaders. Seven times Jesus addressed them in the 23rd chapter of Matthew, saying: **“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites”**. Another time, when Jesus was being faulted for healing a man on the Sabbath, we are told of Jesus: **“He looked around at them in anger,”** and it says Jesus was **“deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts.”** Mark 3:5 It is an angry, zealous Lord we see in the Bible as we hear about him cleansing the temple.

We today want to meditate on:

WHAT JESUS REVEALS ABOUT HIMSELF IN CLEANSING THE TEMPLE.

He shows Himself to be:

- 1. The all-knowing Son of God;**
- 2. A zealous fighter against spiritual corruption; and,**
- 3. Our Savior Lord who would raise his body from the grave on the third day after his death.**

“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” According to the Law of Moses every male Israelite was required to attend the three main Jewish festivals. So Jesus, being under the Law for our sake, also fulfilled the requirement of the Law in attending the Passover in Jerusalem.

Here, when he cleansed the temple, Jesus showed himself to be the all-knowing Son of God. He spoke of himself as God’s Son when he said to those who had corrupted the temple: **“How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!”** It reminds us of when Jesus was 12 years old and as a ‘son of the Law’ attended the Passover at Jerusalem. When his mother asked why Jesus had remained at the temple when they were ready to go home, Jesus said: **“Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”** Luke 2:49 The Gospel of John tells how the Jews were angry at Jesus because **“he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”** 5:18 And there are 79 other passages just in the Gospel of John in which Jesus speaks of God as his Father.

Another way in which Jesus shows himself to be the Son of God is by his omniscient prophecy of his death and resurrection. When the unbelieving Jews demanded of Jesus a miraculous sign to prove that he had the authority to cleanse the temple, Jesus replied: ***“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*** And later our text adds: ***“But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”*** No mere man can tell ahead of time how he is going to die. Jesus knew his body would be destroyed in the sense that he would be put to death on the cross. No mere man can tell what Jesus foretold, that he would raise up his body on the third day after his death. This reveals Jesus to us as the Son of God who knows all things.

And there is yet a third way in which Jesus showed himself to be the all-knowing Son of God. ***“Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name. But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.”*** Jesus knew what was in the hearts of these Jews who for a time believed on him. He knew they believed because of the miracles he performed, not because of the Word he taught them. He knew how many of these same Jews would fall into unbelief later and cry out ***“Crucify him! Crucify him!”*** Luke 23:20 Therefore, Jesus did not entrust himself to these people. He did not confide in them.

From the cleansing of the temple we also learn this, that Jesus showed himself to be a zealous fighter against the spiritual corruption among the Jews.

2.

When Jesus came to the temple at the Passover Feast, our text says: ***“In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.”*** The Jews were required to bring sacrificial animals for the Passover. But many of them from a distance could not bring the animals with them from home. So it was convenient for them to buy the sacrificial animals at Jerusalem. They also had need of money-changers for their foreign coins in buying the animals and paying the tax required by the Law. But all this could have been done at some place away from the house of worship. Instead, the haggling over prices, the clinking of coins, the lowing of the cattle and bleating of the sheep, was right in the temple courts. The merchants were not interested in worship and prayer in God’s house. Their interest was in buying and selling. It was crass commercialism.

This is what made Jesus so angry. ***“So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, 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! How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market!’ His disciples remembered that it is written: ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”*** Jesus was filled with a holy indignation. It hurt him to see his heavenly Father’s house of worship turned into a market place. So Jesus also showed his divine authority by making a whip and driving the merchants and the animals out of the temple. This must be disagreeable to those people who think of Jesus as being only soft and tender. But the correct picture in our mind’s eye here is an indignant Jesus, his eyes flashing with fiery anger.

Thus Jesus showed himself to be a zealous fighter against spiritual corruption. It was not just the desecration of the house of worship that Jesus was concerned about. It was the spiritual corruption in general that Jesus fought against. What they allowed to go on in the temple of the Lord was an indication of the low ebb of spiritual life among the Jews. They were not interested in God’s Word as spoken by the prophets. They were not truly interested in worshiping God. Their religion had degenerated into mere formalism and ceremonialism. They did not accept Jesus as the Messiah to whom all their sacrificial lambs and the shedding of blood pointed. They had not remembered John the Baptist’s words when he pointed to Jesus: ***“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world:”*** John 1:29

In applying the cleansing of the temple to the matter of what is proper and improper in the church today, it is not only the sales, the suppers, the bazaars, the raffles, the bingo games, the merchandizing in the church that is to be condemned. It is the spiritual corruption that has drawn people’s attention away from the Word of God that we are to be concerned about. Paul foretold by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: ***“The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.”*** 2 Tim. 4:3 Someone once wrote: “The greatest abuse of the house of God is in the removal of the Gospel and in the introduction of teachings and worship in conflict with the Gospel.” (Lenski) It is against this that we all should be zealous fighters.

The third thing our Savior revealed about himself in cleansing the temple is that He is our Savior Lord who would raise his body from the grave on the third day after his death.

3.

The Jews had asked for a sign from Jesus to prove his authority in cleansing the temple. Jesus, in answering them, purposely spoke in language that would confuse them: ***“Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.”*** In reply to this amazing statement of Jesus the Jews said: ***“It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?”*** They referred to the temple being rebuilt under King Herod. It was finally completed in the year 64 A.D., only 6 years before the Roman armies destroyed it permanently. ***“But,”*** our text says ***“the temple he had spoken of was his body.”*** That the Jews came to understand this also was evident when they asked Pontius Pilate for a guard of soldiers at the tomb after Jesus’ burial.

Jesus’ words at this time in foretelling his death and resurrection were remembered by the disciples after Jesus had arisen, and our text says: ***“Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.”*** Jesus said he would raise up his body on the third day after his death, and so it also happened. This fact was most important in strengthening the faith of the disciples after the resurrection. They also after Pentecost steadfastly preached and confessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Peter, for example, on the day of Pentecost, in his sermon reminded the people of what David had written in Psalm 16: ***“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”*** Acts 2:31-32 The death of Jesus on the cross and the resurrection on the third day was always the theme of the apostles’ preaching. It was by such preaching that many people came to believe in Jesus.

This is also the truth that must be proclaimed in our day. It not only strengthens our faith that the Old Testament Scriptures were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Savior. It not only strengthens our faith that Jesus is the Son of God. It is also our exceedingly great comfort, for Paul says: ***“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”*** Rom. 4:25

Jesus was put to death for our sins which otherwise would condemn us to everlasting punishment in hell. But that is only part of the good news! God also raised up his Son, and in so doing declared Jesus’ redemptive work perfect, and declared us poor sinners therefore as now righteous in his sight. To these precious Gospel facts Jesus our Savior adds this promise: ***“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.”*** John 11:25 As believers in Christ this is our sure hope! Amen.

Adapted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for March 10, 1985