

John 2:13-22

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” ¹⁹Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Grace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I remember it clearly... I came home from school one afternoon in the Spring of 1997. I was a sophomore in high school. My dad was home early from work and was in our family room watching the television on our massively huge big screen tv. Some of you remember the big box tv's that predated flat screens – the ones that took up half of a room. Ours was elevated on top of an entertainment console that my dad had had custom built to house that monstrosity. As I walked in the front door I heard my dad call to me – Ariel... you've got to come in here and watch this.

I walked into the family room and looked at the screen in time to see the Food Network logo just before the show he was watching went to commercial. I remember thinking – Dear God... what horrid Julia Child wanna-be is he going to make me endure? Because at that point in time... most of the Food Network was a bunch of peppy Caucasian women who had a strong penchant for creating concoctions that never looked appetizing to me. As a matter of fact – my family used to make fun of the Food Network shows and hypothesize about what kind of people actually watched them. So imagine my confusion at finding my dad sitting in his recliner actually choosing to watch this station.

As the show my dad was watching came back on I about jumped out of skin when the host yelled – BAM! First of all – the host was a dude. Second – this dude in no way resembled the typical glorified house-wife talking about the perfect soufflé for their next dinner party. He came across as an extra from the movie *The Godfather*, some Italian mobster who somehow got a cooking show.

I honestly cannot tell you what he cooked on the show that day, just that he yelled “BAM!” and “Kick-it-up-a-notch” and kept telling you to add more “Essence” (which I later learned was just a mix of herbs and spices).

If you still aren’t sure which Food Network star I’m referring to, it’s Emeril Lagasse. So, it turns out, not an Italian mobster... he’s actually of Portuguese decent but you know, grew up in Massachusetts so the accent was deceiving.

Over the course of that Spring, my family watched a lot of Emeril Live! As did many, many others in the United States. The fledgling Food Network suddenly was popular. Because this show and this host was new and different. He was funny, witty, and incredibly entertaining. He wasn’t just cooking – he was performing. He made people, like my friend Josh – who was on a pretty destructive path at the time – reconsider who he was, who he could be, and what he was destined for. BAM! Emeril reset the perception of the Food Network.

In our Gospel lesson this morning Jesus does a little performance art of his own. Just following his first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, Jesus heads to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. It was common at the time for Israelites to pilgrimage for certain religious holidays, Passover being one of them. While there he visits the temple where he finds it to be not just the center of religious rites and worship, but also a center of political intrigue and commerce. There are merchants selling livestock for the ritual sacrifices required of the Israelites at the time. There are money changers who swap out the currency of all of the respective regions and countries of the time and convert it into the temple currency. There were priests and scribes and beggars and prostitutes all peddling their wares or services.

Jesus makes a whip of cords. He MADE it. He doesn't just pick something up that someone had lying around in the heat of the moment— he very intentionally and methodically creates this instrument. BAM! He then uses the whip drive out the livestock and the merchants selling them from the temple market. BAM! He turns over the money changers tables. BAM! He tells everyone to get out and quit making the temple into a marketplace.

The Jews present ask him for a sign to show why they should do this... and he tells them that if they destroy the temple he will raise it again in three days.

The confused Jews say – this temple has been under construction for 46 years... there's no way.

It's noteworthy to know that a more accurate translation of "Jews" would be "Judeans." Their skepticism is not only because Jesus is causing a ruckus, but because he is a Galilean. He's a northerner and they are from the south. So regional and cultural prejudice is definitely influencing this encounter. We know nothing of circumstance such as these do we? Culturally the Northern & Southern United States are identical, right?

As a side note, John tells us that Jesus wasn't talking about the actual temple, but instead about himself.

So, what exactly is going on here? Why is Jesus throwing what appears to be the grand mal of temper tantrums? Is he truly that angry by what he sees in the temple? Is this particular story really important?

We know this story is in fact important because it is one of the few stories that appears in all four of the Gospels. Over 90% of the Gospel of John is unique – so the fact that this is a shared experience with the Synoptic Gospels is telling. However, John places this encounter early in Jesus ministry where the other 3 Gospels place it at the very end.

There are many, many layers of what is going on in this encounter. One of which is that Jesus is being a bit of a social justice warrior. Jesus is seeking to reset the current status quo. At this point in time Jews were cleansed of their sins through ritual sacrifice made during a pilgrimage to the temple. Much of the livestock was brought from the more rural agrarian parts of Israel into the city.

This livestock was purchased at very low prices. It was then in turn sold back to the very people who originally raised it at inflated prices once they arrived in the city because it was unrealistic for them to transport animals that far.

The money changers would take the local currencies and convert them into the temple currency – much like banks in airports will convert American Dollars to the local currency of a foreign country. Only these money changes charged exorbitant fees and skimmed a lot off the top.

It was an unjust and corrupt system that benefited the wealthy and the powerful. The poor and marginalized had no recourse. Sacrifice had to be made in order for sins to be cleansed. There was no blowing off the temple just as we really can't just blow off paying taxes.

Jesus could have shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. Remaining silent in the face of injustice. Instead he made a whip and staged a very public protest. BAM! Jesus challenged societal norms and people in positions of power.

Jesus challenged the status quo and transformed society as he cultivated a ministry following. Jesus reset the perception of acceptable temple culture. Jesus Kicks it up a notch!

Which is why this encounter really sets the religious authorities on edge. This is specific fodder for their arguments to put Jesus to death after he has been arrested.

There are places in our world today that require us to kick it up a notch. Corruption, greed, and economic disparities are just as prevalent today as they were in Ancient Israel. There are still those who are hungry and thirsty. Those who are sick and imprisoned unjustly. Those who have no homes, no clothes, no access to education, no hope.

It is our job to give them hope. We are called to speak out, just as Jesus did, in the face of injustice. We are called to love God by loving our neighbors... especially those neighbors who have no voice. As Pastor Lynn is so apt to say – the love and kindness we show our neighbors is not to earn favor with God, instead is a way to give thanks to God.

We are called to be instruments of change in this world. We are called to be instruments of love, grace, kindness, and hospitality. We are called to make our metaphorical whips and use them to implement change. Be they words,

gatherings, demonstrations, faith acts, service, or worship. Get out there and kick it up a notch! Jesus showed us how. BAM!