

March 15, 2009
Lent 3

"Let Jesus Help You Get Rid of Distractions in Worship"

JOHN 2:13-22

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

When I was studying for the pastoral ministry, I was assigned to serve a one year internship or vicar year in Phoenix, Arizona. My first sermon was preached on a very hot humid morning in September. During the sermon a pesky fly kept landing on my face. Being very nervous, I did not know whether to leave it crawl around, or keep swatting it away. When I let it cling to my face, it did not take long for the congregation to break out into smiles, wondering how long it would be before I swatted the fly away. After the worship I told the supervising pastor how hard it was to keep preaching with that pesky fly clinging to my sweaty face. He said wryly, "That fly has been there for 20 years."

Lots of things can distract us in our worship. Some things are within our control, and some are not, some are sinful, some are not. When Jesus saw all the distractions in the temple in Jerusalem, zeal for his Father's house consumed him. He made a whip from ropes and drove the animals from the temple courts, and turned over the tables of the money changers. That's the kind of zeal we want when we come to worship. This zeal for worship will show itself in how we prepare ourselves for worship, how we pray for blessings on our worship, and how we help our congregation have the best possible worship that keeps our eyes focused on Jesus and the blessings we have in him. This morning we want to speak to you about **"Letting Jesus Help You Get Rid of Distractions in Worship."**

With him you can tell distractions to get out

Jesus could not stand the distractions he saw when he went up to Jerusalem to worship at the time of the Passover. We are told, "When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem." Jesus eagerly anticipated celebrating the Passover with his disciples in Jerusalem. Passover was a time to talk about God delivering his people from the land of Egypt, a time to eat unleavened bread and lamb, and a time to recall how the blood of the lamb was put on the doorposts of the homes to spare the people from the

angel of death that killed the first born in Egypt. People sang, oh, how they loved to sing God's praises as they came together from towns and villages and converged in the temple courts. It was a time to bring a lamb and have it sacrificed in Jerusalem to remind them of the Messiah, the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world.

What did Jesus find when he entered the temple courts? Did he see people gathering in groups and singing the psalms, or people gathering around to hear the Word of the Lord being discussed and read, or people gathering and praying together? No, he found the temple courts filled with people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and people exchanging money that could be used as an offering in the temple. The bleating of sheep, the lowing of cattle, the cooing of doves and the haggling over money was the sound that filled the temple, not the sound of singing and praise to the Lord.

This buying and selling should have taken place outside the temple courts, not in a place where animal sacrifices pointed to the blood of Jesus that would be shed for us.

Fast forward to today. We are a mall-oriented, market driven culture. The Christian church finds itself exposed to the business of marketing and attracting customers, similar to what is used to sell products on television. Today selling religion and selling your church is a huge business as is evidenced by the tremendous amount of mail that comes and the solicitations we receive to help us do a better job of marketing our church.

What would Jesus do with all these distractions that took away from the real meaning of worship? Jesus made a whip from ropes and drove both sheep and cattle from the temple area. He overturned the tables where the money was being exchanged. Hear the clink of coins as they hit the stone pavers. Jesus turned to those who were selling doves and said, "'Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" It was OK to sell animals for sacrifice on the streets of Jerusalem, but this the Father's house. The house of prayer had become a den of thieves.

When the disciples saw the anger in Jesus, they immediately thought of a verse from the Old Testament, from Psalm 69 that predicted such behavior on the part of the Messiah. "His disciples remember that is written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'" A thousand years before Jesus came into the world, he spoke through the psalms of the zeal for his Father's house that would consume. By the blessing of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were able to connect this verse to what Jesus was doing. It was part of his job as the Messiah to have such zeal for true worship, and to get rid of anything that take people's minds away from worship.

Now let's think of our situation here at Star of Bethlehem. Easter is approaching fast, and we want to reach out to people with the message of the gospel. We have provided little cards that you can take with you this morning to hand out to people you meet. Suppose that we were to have a breakfast on Easter morning at 7:00 AM and we invited the community to join us for a small donation. The first year we have 250 show up, and the next year 500 and the following year 1000. All of our energy goes in to providing for the breakfast. Some of our members are so exhausted on Easter morning, they cannot even stay around for the worship service at 10:00 AM and if they do they sleep through most of it. What is wrong with this picture? The food, the eggs, the orange juice, the pancakes,

the rolls, and good coffee became more important than Jesus and his resurrection.

A lady once showed me a religious cartoon. The cartoon showed two churches. There was one with people inside, sitting in the pews, sound asleep. On top of the roof there was a devil, stretched out and taking a nap. He had nothing to do. The people were lifeless and dead. The other church had people inside who were singing praises to the Lord and enjoying their worship. There were dozens of devils on the roof, near the windows, near the door, all trying to get in to distract people from their worship.

We also need Jesus' help to get rid of the personal distractions that come to us to keep us from reading God's Word and growing in our faith. Let's develop a righteous and holy anger, at the things that are distracting us from getting into more of God's Word each day. I am holding a rope in my hand to shape into whip. Is it time to take a whip to some of the time I am spending reading the paper, or watching television, or surfing on the net because I am not spending as much time as I once did reading God's Word.

Remember the story or parable Jesus told about the sower and the seed. Some of the seed fell on hard ground and it was eaten by birds. Some of the seed fell on shallow ground and it grew up quickly but then died for lack of moisture. Some of it grew in good soil but was choked by the cares of this life. Some of it produced a good crop. Which type of seed do you want to be? The answer is obvious. Only in God's Word can I find the words I need to remind me how totally bankrupt and empty I am without Jesus because of my debt of sin. It is in the Word that I discover I cannot save myself. "There is none who does good not one." Only in the word can I hear the words of John the Baptism assure me, "Behold the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."

With him you can focus on the resurrection

When the religious leaders saw Jesus driving the sellers and money changers from the temple area, they became angry with Jesus. They wanted to know what gave him the authority to tell people what could be sold and not sold in the temple courts. That was the job of the priest and Levites. So they ask Jesus for some sign or proof that he has the authority to do this. Jesus responds to them by saying, "Destroy this temple and I will raise again in three days." Jesus was not talking about the temple where he was standing that took Herod 46 years to build. He was talking about the temple of his body that he would raise from the dead after he gave his life on the cross. Later the disciples would remember what Jesus said about destroying the temple of his body and they would believe what the Scriptures and Jesus told them about his resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus is and always will be the heart and core of our worship together. About 15 years ago I stopped in to visit my dad's cousin who had actually lived with my dad's family after their father had died. My dad's cousin Carl told me, "Steve, we don't preach enough about Jesus' resurrection in our churches." Those words have stayed with me. If you don't know what to say about Jesus or your Christian faith, why not join Peter and Paul and the other apostles and talk about Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It is the proof he is God, the proof that what he said is true, the proof that every sin has been paid, and the proof that someday we will rise from the dead on the last day.

Last December, when I went to visit my mom, I also visited Carl who had only a few days to live after losing a battle with cancer. I went into the back bedroom where he was attached to a breathing apparatus, surrounded by his family. Even though he could not respond, I told him how much I appreciated his words about the resurrection. We sang hymns, prayed the Lord's Prayer. My brother and I left and shortly after he went home to heaven believing so confidently in the truths of Jesus' resurrection

The heart and core of all our worship, our Bible reading, are encouraging each other in the faith is Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We want Jesus to help us get rid of the distractions that keep us focus on his resurrection as Paul said, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection." It isn't just for dying that we need Jesus resurrection to sustain. We need for the daily challenges facing us this week. The Savior who raised himself on the third day is still sitting at the right hand of the Father. He is still taking care of his church, including your life and mine, and carefully managing even our time so we have more time in his Word. We pray: "Lord Jesus, help us with the distractions that keep us from your Word. Keep us focused on your resurrection from the dead." Amen.