

Third Sunday in Lent; March 3, 2024

+ John 2:13-22+

“Jesus Changes Our Minds”

**The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

**In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables. He made a whip of chords and drove everyone out of the temple courts, along with the sheep and oxen. He scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables. To those selling doves he said, “Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a place of business!”**

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

**So the Jews responded, “What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?”**

**Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it again.”**

**The Jews said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it three days?” But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.**

What connection did you find among the three sections of Scripture you heard today? First you heard the Ten Commandments. In the Gospel you heard two of the Commandments vividly violated. The Third Commandment tells us to worship God with all our hearts and minds. But in the temple, worship was distracted and weak. The Fifth Commandment forbids greed. But in the temple money had become the main thing.

First we see the Commandments, then see them broken. And when they are, we see how God’s Son reacts. He is violently displeased.

And in the Second Lesson, from Paul’s first letter to saints in Corinth, we see another result of that sin: not only is God angered, but the human mind falls in its sin. The fallen sinful mind arrogantly elevates its own wisdom and knowledge over God, dismissing the good news of salvation as moronic, the cross and resurrection of Jesus as foolishness.

And we see proof of this, too, back in the Gospel. God’s Son has the authority to cleanse God’s house, but the unbelieving minds in the temple dismiss it. They know better than Jesus! And they challenge him for a sign to prove his authority, as fallen minds often challenge God to prove himself with something spectacular. But God does not play such games; he is under no obligation to prove himself with fireworks to fallen minds, minds that would not change even he did provide such a sign.

We need to see not only how these sections of Scripture connect to each other, but also how they connect to us. God’s Commandments are for all people. And we have all broken them. To return to the two we see broken in the Gospel, we also offer God corrupted worship. When we are here, if we are here, part of us wants to be somewhere else. When God’s Word is read, part of us is bored. You don’t have to set up money tables in a sanctuary to anger God with weak worship. We do it, too. And, to return to the other sin of the Gospel, we attach far greater importance to money than we need to. We buy into the lie, at least a little, at least once in a while, that a person’s life is measured by his wealth. This, too, angers God.

And our sin also infects our attitudes. It tears down our minds so that we raise them above God's. The sin in our minds, too, finds the cross of Christ a silly answer to sin, if there is such a thing as sin. Our fallen minds, too, are arrogant enough to challenge God to prove himself with something amazing before we will accept his authority. "God, if you want me to believe in you, you better show me something here!"

But what does Jesus do with God's Commandments? **The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem...He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables...His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."** He keeps them. In him is perfect worship and no trace of greed. He left the riches of heaven and became poor. And why does Jesus make himself poor and come down to keep the Commandments perfectly? It was the first part of God's plan to save us. And here is the rest: **"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again,"** was his answer to the unbelieving challenge for a sign. God's holy temple came to be destroyed, and knows it even now, very early in his ministry. The holy Son of God, the perfect temple, was holy for our sake, for the forgiveness of our sins. And the temple was destroyed for our forgiveness, too, only to rise again. Paul calls this gospel message **the power of God and the wisdom of God.** In Jesus' death and resurrection is God's power and wisdom to save us from our sins.

As always, God uses his wisdom and power for our good. The gospel of Jesus' love is God's wisdom and his power to change fallen minds. **Indeed, since the world through its wisdom did not know God, God in his wisdom decided to save those who believe, through the foolishness of the preached message.** God reaches out to us with the message of salvation in Christ, and the Spirit changes our view of that message from foolish to divinely wise, from powerless to divine power to save. **...but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.**

The disciples' minds had been changed to faith. So when Jesus predicted his own death and resurrection, they did not mock it as foolishness. They did not fully understand it at the time, but they believed Jesus – and later understood his words fully. In Christ's gospel, God has changed our minds to trust his wisdom. Some of it he has revealed to us very clearly in his Word, most of it he keeps hidden in his own mind. But he raised our minds to trust him, even when we wait to understand his ways.

God changes our minds in this way, too: to agree with, and to live by, his Commandments. The mind changed to faith in Christ says, "Yes, of course," to God's command to worship him with all our hearts. It says, "No, of course not," to God's command not to be greedy. The changed mind knows God loves us. It understands he does not give us his Commandments to depress us and to deprive us, but to bless us. Life is better with worship than without it, and God knows that. It really is better to live without greed, more blessed, happy, to give than to receive, to use wealth to make friends for yourself.

Dear Jesus, thank you for changing our minds to see salvation in you, to see God's Word as true wisdom, to see his Commandments as good. This is your Spirit's work through the gospel, to change us. It is your pure grace. For this change we give you glory now, and will glorify you face to face. Amen.