

Being the Church at Brentwood

The New Temple

**Psalm Ps 19 and John 2:13-22
(Hymns – 205, 9, 210, 194)**

March 11, 2012

It's not the temple that counts.
It's what happens in the temple.

It's not primarily about a building.
It's first and foremost about a relationship.

It's not a static place.
It's a moving presence.

Those are the key insights
the Holy Spirit inspired in me this week
as I conversed with this passage
and explored what others had to say about it.

The story of Jesus expelling the sellers and money-changers
from the temple in Jerusalem just prior to Passover
occurs in all four gospels.
It is an act of economic and religious disturbance,
an very public prophetic protest against abuses that had developed
around the worship of his heavenly Father.
Those abuses exploited the poor and insulted God.
There was a passion burning within Jesus
for a religious and spiritual community
within which all were welcomed
and God was worshipped in beauty and in truth.
Beautiful and grand as the temple might have been,
or as any of our large churches might be,
it is the relationship nourished with the presence of God there
that matters most.
And this can happen in the humblest of places.

Each of the gospel writers puts this story in a different place
as they interpret the meaning of the story of Jesus.
They not only tell us what happened as they remember it,
they also emphasize the significance for them of what happened.
John, for example, sets the story at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Matthew recalls the story happening during Holy Week,
after Jesus had entered Jerusalem for the final confrontation
with the religious and political powers of the day.

In Mark, the story is closer to the middle of his gospel,
but again, as is true of Luke as well, shortly after the entry into Jerusalem.

John uses the story as a setting for Jesus' teaching
about his death and resurrection.

Here's another way in which the disciples
are going to have to think differently
about who God is and how to relate to him.
God is not to be found in the rituals of the temple,
but in the relationship they have with Jesus Christ.

It's not about places you go or things you buy
or sacrifices you make or religious leaders you obey.

It's about being part of the body of Jesus Christ in the world,
the new temple God created at Easter over 2,000 years ago.

Jesus Christ is the gathering place for the people of God.
He is the centre of worship and learning for the people of God.
He is the focus of fellowship for the people of God.
He is the inspiration of service for the people of God.

Being in relationship with Jesus Christ,
being tuned to and for his work and witness in the world,
is the what happens in the temple of that relationship.

Paul picked up on this idea when he emphasized so often
that being Christian meant being "in Christ."
By this phrase, he meant we are in union with Jesus Christ.
Christ is in us and we are in Christ.
That is the kind of loving, forgiving reconciliation
God accomplished for all of humanity at Easter.

In that relationship, we are cleansed, restored, and inspired to bless.
This is everything that was supposed to happen in the temple.
Jesus disturbing critique of and prophetic protest against
what was actually happening in the temple
got him killed.

So, being in relationship with Jesus Christ is a costly business.
Your life will change.
You will lose old ways of seeing and doing things.
You will be guided into new ways of flourishing in the grace of Jesus Christ.

Out of that relationship with Jesus Christ
will flow all that is beautiful, good, and true.
We will become blessings
by realizing and respecting that Christ is in us and we are in Christ.
He is our temple and we are his.

But what does that mean in terms of our daily lives?
Apart from this couple of hours together on a Sunday morning,
what's the significance of this rather complex set of ideas
about Christ in us and us in Christ?

Let me just highlight a couple of ideas as suggestions.
There are many more and I trust the Spirit will inspire you
to think of them this coming week
as we read and reflect together on next week's text
that you have in your bulletin insert.

First, I'd suggest that these ideas speak powerfully
to how we see and treat ourselves.
Do we think about ourselves negatively or positively?
If we are the temples of Christ in this world
(albeit not by our own efforts, but by God's grace),
then we should think positively about ourselves,
paying attention to the gifts and strengths God has given us
to use to be a blessing to others and the creation.
This new way of seeing ourselves best remains humble,
but there is a core confidence in being the beloved child and friend of God
that serves us well as we build the resilience to face our challenges.

Second, these ideas speak powerfully
to how we see and treat others.
There has been a lot of attention focused on bullying in recent weeks.
That kind of intimidating disrespect,
whether it happens individually or through a political or economic system,
has no place in the lives of those who live in Jesus Christ.
Ours is a temple of reverence and respect.

That's just a taste of how profound and powerful
these ideas of being in the temple of Jesus Christ and us being Christ's temple
are in shaping our work and witness in the world.
I'm sure you will find more
as you live more consciously in the presence of Jesus Christ this week.