

Notes for Brian's Sermon at Brentwood Presbyterian Church

Sun, Mar 4, 2018 – Celebrating Holy Communion

What Zeal Consumes You?

(Psalm 19 & John 2:13-22)



He told those who were selling the doves,
"Take these things out of here!
Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"
His disciples remembered that it was written,
"Zeal for your house will consume me."
(John 2:16-17)

Overview

Presbyterians prefer the calm and collected Jesus – the wise and welcoming saviour – gentle and kind – we are not known for our passion and zeal – no fiery preachers on the street corners threatening hell and damnation – no door-to-door evangelists desperate to know what would happen if you died tonight – as one of my Pentecostal friends once said, "Dull and indifferent!"

Provocative Points to Ponder

- So, what do we do with this text this morning? – here is a Jesus who does get all hot and bothered – he is consumed by a zeal and a passion that seems so inappropriate – and all of this happens in the centre of religious propriety and power – throwing over tables – taking a whip to the culprits who are turning a place of devotion and worship into meat market – granted, it's only one story from all those years of public mission – but it's a story that is remembered and recorded – that gives it a special significance – let's dig into that a bit further
- Let's begin with what angers Jesus, what offends his zeal – two things stand out for me – first, from Psalm 69, the Psalm his disciples remember when they see his outrage, Jesus wants the temple to be a place where the steadfast love of God for all people is honoured and celebrated, so the oppressed and the persecuted become glad in what God is doing with them and for them – Jesus zeal is for the Commonwealth of God – those right relationships among God, all peoples, and the authentic selves God has created us to be in this community – second, this is part of a broader condemnation of the whole system of trying to satisfy God with sacrifices – it's a story line that still holds a lot of power within religious circles, including Christianity – it runs something like this – I'm bad, God's mad, I have to pay, Jesus paid for me, I owe Jesus – the fancy name for this way of thinking within the Christian tradition is 'the substitutionary doctrine of the atonement' – Jesus paid our debt to God and we are obligated to him for doing that for us – our salvation is conditional – it depends on our accepting the obligations laid upon us by Jesus' sacrifice to satisfy the demands of an angry, judgemental God – many find a different story line in the witness of Jesus and the records that his disciples collected and passed on to future generations – this story line has God pursuing a rebellious humanity with forgiving and reconciling love – in the events of Easter, that love emerged victorious over all attempts to ignore or suppress it, to confine and possess it, to control and manipulate it – Jesus zeal, the passion that led to this outburst of indignation, is focused on how to properly honour and worship God – by doing justice, being kind, and humbly accepting God's invitation to participate in the steadfast love of the Lord

- In some ways, this story takes us back to the temptations that we explored a couple of weeks ago – it is far too easy for us to be consumed with zeal for our possessions, our prestige, and our power – especially in a secular culture where the reality of a transcendent power who loves each and every one of us with a freeing and healing love is dismissed so pervasively – all of our needs for security, appreciation, and power can be satisfied with material things and manipulation – Jesus resisted all of this and stayed focused on his zeal for the mission of God – for a world-wide community of justice, kindness, and humility – the story of cleansing the temple points to the depth of his pain at the violation of this vision by those running things in his day

So, what do we do with this?

In this season of reflection on where our loyalties lie, on what really consumes our zeal, mild as that zeal may be, perhaps we can connect our explorations today with the words/phrases we chose two weeks ago for our Lenten focus – I've heard 'forgiveness' and 'unconditional' as words chosen – I mentioned that mine was the phrase 'the duty of delight' from the writings of Dorothy Day, a grass-roots advocate for justice and kindness in the United States – so, how does Jesus' zeal for the Commonwealth of God, a zeal that truly consumed him in the sense of embracing his whole life, how does that zeal inform and illuminate your reflections on your word/phrase? – ponder that some more as Dan (and ...) play our music for reflection as we prepare to gather at the Lord's table to remember again the gifts God has freely given us in Jesus Christ

Your Notes