

Sermon for March 8, 2015
John 2:13-22

Today's Gospel reading is recorded by all four of the Gospel writers, but John's version is different from the other three. The main difference is the placement of the story in the life of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke all have this story as the end of Jesus' life and state it as being the reason why the Pharisees looked to put him to death. John on the other hand has this story at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Why the difference?

We've talked before how what is placed at the beginning is important. It's the same with John. He uses this event in Jesus' life to announce the beginning of a new way of being able to worship God. God's grace will no longer be mediated through sacrifices, but through the belief that Jesus is God's Messiah.

Another difference in John from the other Gospels is the accusation that Jesus gives to the moneychangers in the Temple. In the other three Gospels Jesus accuses them of turning the Temple into a den of robbers. Here Jesus is upset with them because they have turned the Temple into a market place.

But before we go any further let me explain that because of the practices of the day; the Temple had to be a market place. People traveled hundreds of miles from all over the Middle East to celebrate the Passover Festival in Jerusalem. They needed a place to buy the animals necessary for their sacrifices—which by the way were commanded by God for them to do—and they needed a place to exchange their Roman currency into Temple currency that was acceptable for use. So when Jesus drove out the sheep and the cattle, poured out the coins of the moneychangers and turned over their tables, and chased out those selling doves; he was announcing the end of how they were relating to God and ushering in a new era.

No longer is the Temple the only place where God is available. Now Jesus is inviting us to experience God's grace by believing in him. Why is this so important to John? When John's Gospel was written the Temple had long been destroyed by the Romans. There no longer was a

Temple in which they could worship. This community needed to be reassured that they would find God's mercy outside the Temple in Jesus. That fact is as true today as it was in John's time.

Many of us today when we think of church we think of a place, a destination. It's where we go to receive spiritual things. But what if instead of it being a place to go to, we think of it as being a place from where we're sent from so that we can partner with God for ministry in our everyday lives?

Let me give you an example of what I mean. In C. S. Lewis' book, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe, The four Pevensie children go from war-torn London to Narnia and meet the great lion Aslan and with his help they defeat the White Witch who has been holding Narnia in perpetual winter. In the second book the children all go back to Narnia to help Prince Caspian regain his rightful throne. At the end of the book Aslan tells the two oldest children, Peter and Susan, that they will not return again to Narnia.

Now at the end of the third book, The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader', Aslan meets with Lucy and Edmond and tells them that this was to be their last time in Narnia. Lucy is very upset with the prospect of never seeing her beloved lion Aslan again, but he reassures her that she will see him again—in her own world. Lucy's surprised that Aslan is present in her world and he explains to her that the whole reason they were brought to Narnia was for them to get to know him well enough there, so that they could recognize him easily back in her own world.

That's a great image for the church! When we come to church we are able to perceive God's grace most clearly in the proclamation of the Gospel and the sharing of the Sacraments. But we don't stay here, we're sent out into the world to look for God and to partner with God in our everyday lives to love and care for the people and world that God loves so much.

But how many of us see it that way? I know that it took me awhile to see my work at the factory as a place where God was present and wanting to work through me for the sake of the world. Do you see your homes, your places of work or school or where you volunteer as a place where God is partnering with you? Most likely you don't and part of it is my fault as a pastor.

When we only emphasize the roles and activities we do at church, such as installing Sunday school teachers and council members, blessing those who go on mission trips, but neglect other parts of our lives; we unintentionally make those other roles seem to be less important than what we do at church.

If we don't have to come to church to experience God; why come to church? We come because it is at worship that we hear God's word proclaimed in a way that helps us to see and experience God in all of our life. We come not because church is the only place where God is, but because it is here that we are fed and nourished so that we can be sent out into the world to serve our neighbors in all of our various vocations.

Take a few moments now and think about where you are going to be this week and in the weeks to come and then think about how we can partner with God in our everyday lives to bring about God's kingdom. Whether you'll be working in a pharmacy, selling equipment, taking care of your family, going to school, volunteering at VINE or the Salvation Army, working with disabled adults, teaching, putting together school year books, making deliveries, giving chemotherapy to cancer patients, landscaping, checking bank books, preparing taxes or taking teenage boys on a Hot Wheels run; whatever we do and wherever we are God is there with us calling us to ministry out in this world that God loves so much. Keep your eyes open and you'll be surprised by what you see.