

Spring Cleaning in the Temple, John 2:13-22

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During this past couple of years, the following television shows developed a faithful following. They are:

Hot Mess House-seen on the Discovery channel was designed to help people reorganize mess and clutter in their homes.

Get Organized with the Home Edit-also seen on Netflix. This is about organizing and de-cluttering.

Tidying Up with Marie Kondo-also on Netflix is about those who need to overhaul or renovate different rooms in their homes.

Hoarders-needs no explanation.

Clean House-watched by those on Hulu features hostess Niecy Nash who saves disorganized homes from clutter. And there seems to be a real interest in these types of shows. And just like those programs, we should address those areas in our spiritual walk that need attention.

My scripture text is John 2:13-22 and it is about the time Jesus overthrew the tables of the money changers and merchants of greed. I see this as Jesus' version of a spiritual spring cleaning in the temple.

¹³ When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of

ords, and drove all from the temple courts, 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! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me."^[a]¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What 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 They 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. This is the Word of God.

Today's gospel setting took place in the ancient temple of Jerusalem which was a 14-acre complex that was a series of rectangles with temple in the middle. There was the Court of the Gentiles, the Court of the Woman, The Court of the Men, the Court of the Priests and the Holy of Holies which was reserved only for the high priest one time a year.

But the largest area was called the Court of the Gentiles. And it was here the money changers and those who sold animals set up shop. Almost similar to the outdoor fairs where vendors are lined up in rows next to each other.

Since it was the Passover, the biggest holiday of the Jewish year, like our Christmas, the Court of the Gentiles was jammed with people from all over the known world and the revenue brought in was extremely profitable.

The Court of the Gentiles was supposed to be a place of reverence where worshippers could reflect about God and prepare themselves for sacrifice. But instead, this sacred space had become a den of corruption, greed and dishonesty.

Here was the dilemma. If Jewish pilgrims were to bring their own bull, lamb or goat from home to be sacrificed, it had to be inspected by temple authorities for defects. And 99/100 times, it would have been rejected, which forced the worshipper to buy the more expensive animal.

It was like the frustration we have when we buy a snack at an airport, the movie theater, or theme park concession stand, where prices are usually marked up by as much as 50%. Back then, worshippers had no choice but to accept the price gouging.

And it was that type of greed that angered Jesus. His message was that God's house is to be a place of prayer, not a place of price gouging. Add to that-Each Jew had to pay a one time a year temple tax and the local currency that the people used was not allowed and of course the exchange rates helped enrich the high priest's family.

So, when Jesus overthrew the money changers, the temple authorities were outraged, but the people inwardly cheered because someone finally addressed the abuses of the system.

This story is difficult to embrace. For most, the image of Jesus is kind and gentle and we see pictures of our Lord with a little lamb around his shoulders or surrounded by children. But He got angry and drove animals away and overthrew the corrupt money changers as if He were doing some spiritual spring cleaning in the temple and it needed it. Ephesians tells us, "Be angry, but do not sin."

Today the Jewish temple no longer exists and animal sacrifices ceased some 2000 years, though there are numerous synagogues throughout the world. But an important part of the Christian faith is when we invite the Lord into our hearts and our bodies become the earthly temple of the living God.

The Apostle Paul spoke of this.

1 Corinthians 3:16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have received from God. You are not bought with a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, which is your spiritual act of worship.

Last summer, I put a plastic trash bag in the trunk of my car to bring to the Hillsboro recycling center. But first I stopped at the church. Minutes stretched into hours and when I finally got back into my car, the stench of the garbage was noticeable.

The stench of corruption was what Jesus experienced in God's holy temple. The same situation could correspond to our spiritual lives. If we do not remove those habits, sins, or bad attitudes that could be compared to the stench of sin.

There is a prayer that I occasionally use which is found on page 12 in the UMH. **Merciful God, we confess that we have not loved you with our whole heart. We have failed to be an obedient church. We have not done your will, we have broken your law, we have rebelled against your love, we**

have not loved our neighbors, and we have not heard the cry of the needy. Forgive us, we pray.

Psalm 119:9-11 says: How can a young person stay on the path of purity? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart; do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart.

One of Michelangelo's greatest works was when he took five years to paint biblical scenes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. After some 500 years after its completion, the art work had begun to fade and starting in 1981, art specialists cleaned and restored the frescoes in 1990.

While this took twice as long to clean the ceiling as it took for Michelangelo to paint it, illustrates the importance and need for us to periodically do a self-inventory.

As Christian believers, it is important we keep our human temples of God in good condition. How can we do that? Here are some suggestions:

1. Develop your prayer life and find someone who can join you.
2. Continue to attend church, but if you are home-bound due to Covid, watch this sermon on our Facebook page or read it on-line.
3. Have daily devotions and read through the Bible in a year.
4. Ask yourself, what clutter do I have in my heart that crowds out my relationship with God?
5. We could extend the care of our human temples to include good health habits such as proper nutrition and exercise. This

human temple is the only one we have and if we neglect it, we cheat God out of long and fruitful service.

Let me close, spring is a time we spruce up our homes and offices. And like those television shows, let this season be the time we examine our spiritual lives as we eliminate hindrances from our spiritual life.