

## **“Jesus: Prophet, Priest and King”**

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday March 7, 2021

John 2:13-22

This morning our gospel reading is from John’s gospel.

We are early in the gospel, chapter 2. In John’s gospel, Jesus’ first miracle, what happens just before our passage for this morning is Jesus turns water into wine.

This miracle evokes memories of the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Quietly performed in the private setting of a Galilean wedding, this miracle revealed Jesus glory to his disciples.

The next passage, our reading for this morning, has a very different tone. The setting of this passage is Jerusalem during Passover. Jesus goes up to the city, to attend the festival, but his actions are those of an angry prophet, not a Passover pilgrim.

Jesus enters the sacred space of the Temple which looked and sounded more like an open-air market than a Temple. Cattle bellowing, sheep bleating, turtledoves cooing, people yelling, coins clanging.

Ironically, the activity was necessary for the functioning of the temple. The temple tax had to be paid in temple coinage, so money changers were necessary. Sacrificial animals were needed and so the animal sellers were necessary.

But somehow in service to the institution, the market had taken over and it was no longer a place of prayer and worship. The place appeared to fulfill its function, closer inspection revealed it had forgotten its purpose. The trappings were still in place but the place had no heart for its original purpose: worship. This passage

stands as a warning to the church, and should cause us all to squirm more than a little.

The ways of the world invade the church gradually, subtly, never intentionally, always in service to the institution and its mission. Soon the church is full of cattle and sheep and turtledoves and money changers, and it has lost its heart as a place of worship and prayer.

Jesus is outraged by what he saw and created a holy havoc as he moved through the Temple court overturning tables and driving the market sellers and animals out.

So what does this passage mean for us?

Why do I say that this passage stands as a warning for us?

Is there anything we do that is not about worship?

We feed people, we used to have coffee time after church, and most of us wish we could do that today.

Why do we feed people?

We express God's care for the world.

We, who are in Christ, and Christ is at work in us, care about the world Jesus loves.

It is an expression of our worship of God.

We love and worship God, and so out of our embrace of God, we embrace the world God loves, with a view of helping others to see God's love and come into relationship with God also.

Why do we have fellowship times after church, or church meals?

It is an expression of our worship.

Our love for God is expressed in our desire to build up the body of Christ.

To build up the body of Christ I need to have fellowship and friendship and times to care and support brothers and sisters in Christ.

Building that relationship happens over meals, in getting to know people so that I can support and bless them.

Some of you who know me well, will know that I am not a fan of some church meals. My frustration sometimes is that they don't seem to be about worship and growing closer to God and closer to each other. People come in, eat, leave. They don't meet others, they don't share in a meaningful way, the body of Christ is not strengthened, God is not worshipped.

I have seen churches feed people, give food, open a food bank, serve meals, but again, there is no worship, no service to God, no drawing people closer to God, no embrace of God in the midst. There probably was at the beginning, but somewhere the focus slipped, and the church became a social agency, or a service club.

And then I see fund raising replace the work of the church. People in the church become so busy serving the institution, raising money for the budget or this or that project, that they stop serving God. The focus became the money, and stopped being God.

And then there is worship itself.

There are churches where people are just going through the motions. And churches where people are simply the audience, and the worship leaders are performers.

Every good intention, every good impulse can be corrupted, too often we get it wrong.

But this morning I want you to hear that Jesus is not just the prophet who comes in to create holy havoc and bring the church back on track. He is also our Priest and King.

Jesus told the people “*you* destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.”

And we confess that we are always in danger, and frequently do things that destroy the church- the body of Christ. Not intentionally, but we do.

But Jesus is the king and head of the church.

The church is his body, and when we tear it down, he raises it up again on third day.

He is our Saviour.

He is our hope, and we are driven to repent, and to turn to him again, our only source of life, truth, and salvation.

Jesus is the one who as our Priest prays for us, as he does from the cross; “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do.”

The Presbyterian Church claims to be reformed and ever reforming. But that is to misunderstand the original motto, and what it is to be Christ’s church.

We are not the agents of change.

The original motto was to be “*reformed and always being reformed by the Word of God.*”

Jesus judges and renews His church, by his Word and work in our midst. We are in need of being conformed to Jesus and His word.

AS we come to our Lord’s table, we come to our Prophet who corrects us and calls us, to our Priest who prays for us and renews us, and our King that we worship, and acknowledge is over all.  
Thanks be to God.