

“Remember You Are Dust”
by Rev. Frances Savill
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John 2:13-22

Prayer for Understanding

Creator God, your Word is the rock beneath our feet, a firm foundation for our lives. Send us your Holy Spirit to be our guide and our light of understanding as we listen for your solid wisdom this day in the name of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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. 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*.

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.

Think deeply about the Temple for a few minutes. It was to function as the place that people came into close proximity to God. They could meet God there. The Temple didn't contain God, but it was a holy and sacred place. The Temple was to be the place where people also flocked to find healing. The nations were to stream to Jerusalem to the Temple to worship, to experience healing and hope, justice and the life of the Kingdom of God in its full.

When Jesus went up to the Temple he found the opposite. The Kingdom of God that Jesus was ushering in was at odds with the way things were operating in the Temple. When Jesus meets anyone or anything that is at odds with ushering in the Kingdom of God, Jesus cleans house.

It is the clash of two kingdoms.

For those possessed by demons, Jesus drives out the evil. For those consumed by disease, Jesus brought healing and saving wholeness. The dead are raised to new life. Jesus clears out the Temple, reminding all of them that God's house was to be a house of prayer.

Ultimately, Jesus doesn't just tweak the system or make adjustments to the Temple, Jesus sees that the destruction of the building and system was coming, and Jesus brings in a whole new way of being God's people.

Jesus became the new Temple. The place where heaven and earth meet is Jesus. The place where people find healing, justice, worship, oneness with God, is in Jesus.

Jesus said, destroy this Temple, the real Temple, the Temple of his body, and he would raise it up again in three days.

Jesus became the Temple that we all have access to. We all worship in Christ and in His Spirit, and in worshipping Jesus, it is no longer a **place** where we all go to find life and forgiveness, but it is in the **person** of Jesus that we go.

In the words of Paul, Jesus, the Messiah of God is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. Jesus is our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

This passage about Jesus clearing the Temple, about his holy frustration with the institution that was meant to draw people closer to God in worship and prayer, 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.

Is there anything we do that is not about worship, that does not serve to draw people closer to God in worship and prayer?

Some churches have meals and social times. 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. It feels more like diners getting a free lunch.

Some churches feed the poor, 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.

Service clubs and social agencies do the same. Sometimes churches want to fund raise, support the good work, but all the time and energy go to supporting the institution that no one has time or energy to be the church, to be the hands and feet of Jesus sharing the gospel.

And then there is worship itself. Some churches are filled or not filled with people going through the motions, where mostly it is audiences and performers.

Every good intention, every good impulse can be corrupted; too often we get it wrong. And even when it starts out right, other agendas slip in, it's subtle, mostly unintentional, always in service of the institution, but we can find the church adrift.

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."

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. 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."

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.

We hear the call of Jesus our Prophet who corrects 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.