

“Cleanin Out Your Closet”

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Today’s gospel lesson is from the book of John, chapter 2, verses 13-22. I’ll be reading from the *Common English Bible*. The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 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.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God.

Let us pray. God of zeal, whose Son became a sacrifice for our sin, make our hearts your home where you alone reside—a temple where you live. Move us to draw close to you as you clean every room in our hearts, for we know you walk alongside us. Help us to work and cooperate with you as you reclaim our hearts. Turn our hearts upside down. Sweep and drive out everything that’s not of you so we would seek you with our whole heart. Amen.

The season of Lent is a time when we take a closer look at our spiritual lives by examining ourselves. We pray more, read the Bible more, attend a Bible study at church, and make more sacrifices for others. We add a discipline to our spiritual devotion. We take away something we love or something that's become a hindrance in our lives in order to draw closer to God. Centuries ago Lent was a preparation for Easter or as it was called, the "Feast of Feasts." It was in the spring when newness of life begins again.

Interestingly enough, spring cleaning is a part of Jewish custom, and Passover is the time when it occurs. The Jewish people would meticulously clean their homes in anticipation of the spring-time memorial feast of Passover. Passover was in remembrance of the Jews' hasty flight from Egypt following their captivity there.

The season of Lent is about house cleaning. It's going into every room and sweeping things away that shouldn't be there. It's washing away the dirt that accumulates from being in the world. We brush away the cob webs, we vacuum under the bed, and we scrape up the sticky gunk under the fridge we forgot was there. We pay attention to detail and allow God to work in us.

Wow! Jesus did some *real* serious spring cleaning in the temple that day. In fact, John sees it as being so important that he put it at the very beginning of his gospel. In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the authors put it at the end of their gospel. I guess it's an editor's preference.

Why did John do this? Maybe from the very start the apostle wanted to show how this radical Jesus was putting an end to the old way of doing things. The animal sacrifices were totally irrelevant. For centuries the prophets had said exactly that. Now it was coming to pass. No animal sacrifices or the blood of bulls and goats could ever take away our sin to make us right with God.

With all of Jesus' radical righteous anger going on here, he's definitely getting everyone's attention. Maybe he's telling the religious people of that day that God's presence is *with him* and *in him*—it's not in a building. The Presence of God will be in and among his people; it won't be in a building all boxed in. Now . . . God will walk along beside us.

I'm wondering if we forget this at times. Do we forget that God lives in us and walks along beside us? That in each and every one of us God has this sacred space that's reserved only for him. It's a space that no one else can go to except God and us. It's a very intimate space that's set-apart and holy. It's personal and dedicated only for two—God and you. It's a space we go to and Jesus is always there, and we tell him our darkest secrets. It's a space we cry in and ask . . . why God?

It's a deep place in us where God lives, and it's where we feel peace and the unconditional love of God. It's a place where God helps us get strength to continue. It's where we get filled up with love again and again for those who have hurt us. Maybe this is what Jesus was saying when he cleansed the temple. He chased out the animals and the money changers and made a whip of cords driving them all away from the temple. All that stuff—all it did was hinder people from seeking the presence of God. It got in the way and kept God at a distance.

The rapper musician, Eminem had a hit song titled "*Cleanin Out My Closet*" in 2002. Eminem goes into his closet and does some cleaning. He apologizes to his mom for hurting her, but he says she was a bad mother. He says his father abandoned him, and that he'll promise to be a better father himself. This is what the Christian's secret place can be like. We go into our prayer closet, we get transparent with Jesus, we tell all, and we get clean. We take time to get intimate with our Savior.

People regard rap music as the ugliest form of music, but I'll tell you this. When Jesus went into that temple to do some spring cleaning it was an ugly scene. Jesus was in a tirade! He made a whip of cords and scared the bajoobas out of everyone! What happened to that gentle fatherly figure that welcomes children and holds white lambs in his arms? Whoa, did he get up on the wrong side of the bed or what? Is this the dark side of the human man Jesus?

One thought might be this. This ugly scene took place in the Court of the Gentiles where all the money changers and animals were. This is where people would come to pray, meditate, and seek God. What if, just what if, there was a Gentile whose heart God had touched, and he came into the temple to pray. Can you imagine all the noise that would've been going on—all the bleating sheep, the screaming traders, and the oxen bellowing? It would've been pretty difficult to feel God's presence. Could be that those who were seeking the presence of God were shut out. that they couldn't reach God because of all the noise, distraction, and who knows what else!

So what about us? Do we shut people out of our church? Do we speak to people we don't know and welcome them, or do we leave that to someone else? Maybe we figure it's the greeter's job? Are we more concerned with other things than greeting people we haven't talked to or gotten to know? Maybe we just want our church to be a closed club of sorts. Maybe we don't want seekers in here maybe we just want people like us here—somebody we can relate to.

So Jesus turned the money changers tables over. He turned lives upside down by his radical behavior and message. So the season of Lent is designed to do that for us! Let's allow this season to disrupt our lives, but in a positive way. Don't be afraid to change some things that need to be changed. Make the effort and allow Jesus to take you through some serious spiritual renewal. Let him turn you upside

down. Go go on clean your closet. Drive out all the things in your life that shouldn't be there. Let's make this season of Lent different from all the other ones that came before. Let's do some serious spring cleaning.

Let's pray. Jesus, you cleansed the temple that day so we'd get the point. You got radical and wild so we'd listen to you. You overturned the tables of our hearts and showed us how dirty the rooms of our hearts are! Show us how to change our indifference and get serious about our relationship with you. Save us from our own falsehood and deceit. Open our hearts and revive our souls as you instruct our hearts. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.