

Significant Action – Monday of Holy Week

Lenten Midweek #2 – 02/24/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.
Text: Mark 11:15-19 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 17, [Jesus said,] **“Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers”.**

Introduction

- ✘ You and I, like many Christians, I think are fairly familiar with the major events that took place on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday.
 - ➔ But what took place on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of that Holy Week; the week of our Lord’s Passion?
 - ➔ Those three days actually contain some of Jesus’ most significant actions, most significant teachings, and most significant confrontations with the religious leaders of His day.
- ✘ So, beginning tonight and continuing through the remaining five midweek Lenten services, we are going to explore together what took place on those three significant days – the days between Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday.

I. Significant Action – Clearing the Temple

- ✘ Our text this evening takes place on Monday of Holy Week. The day before; on Palm Sunday, Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with great enthusiasm and shouts of, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Mt. 21:9).
 - ➔ That day ended with a bit of an ominous note according to verse 11 just before our Gospel Reading. Mark tells us that “[Jesus] entered Jerusalem and went into the temple. And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the twelve”.
- ✘ The next day; the day we are considering here tonight, Jesus would do a lot more than just look around at the temple grounds. You see, Jesus was disgusted with what He saw the day before, so much so, that He had to take significant action.
 - ➔ Some might even say that His actions were a bit over the top, rude or even disrespectful. Mark records that Jesus began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple grounds. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.
 - ➔ To justify His actions, Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 from our Old Testament Reading. He says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (v.17). Clearly this is not the meek and mild, peace-maker-for-all-the-World Jesus that we sang about at Christmas.
- ✘ So just what’s happening here in our text? First we need to remember what time of year it is. This is the biggest and busiest time for Jews at the Temple.
 - ➔ It is the Passover festival; the time each year that the Jews remember and celebrate how God delivered His people out of their slavery in Egypt. Throngs of Jews came to Jerusalem each year to celebrate.
 - ➔ Many came from far away to offer their sacrifices at the Temple altar. And it was much easier for them to buy the animals they needed for the sacrifices in Jerusalem rather than try and bring those animals with them over a long journey.
- ✘ To make matters more expedient, the Jewish priests “conveniently” had preapproved animals there at the Temple which these travelers could of course purchase.

- As with all things in the financial world, if something is more convenient, it also comes at a premium price. That was the case with these animals in Jerusalem. It was a “big” business.
- There were even reports of kickbacks from the Temple merchants to some of the priests. It was even the case that some of the priests would not approve the animals that were purchased outside the Temple for sacrifice, in order to force the people to buy from the official temple vendors; the ones giving the kickbacks. You see, for the vendors and the priests it was a win-win financial arrangement.
- ✘ On top of that, travelers coming into Jerusalem for Passover often came with foreign currency that had to be exchanged for the currency that was “approved” for payment of the temple tax.
 - You can only guess what that meant, right? Many or most of these money-changers of course charged inflated exchange fees.
- ✘ Hence Jesus’ stated concern: The focus of the Temple was now no longer on God, prayer, and sacrifice, but on the “business” of the Temple at Passover time. In fact, “business” (i.e. making money) was now the point of emphasis.
- ✘ But we’re still not done setting the stage. There was something even more egregious taking place. Notice in the text how Jesus’ quote from Isaiah states that the Temple, “His” temple, was intended to be a “house of prayer for all the nations”.
 - God never wanted it to be a house of prayer just for Jews. He even said in verses 6-7 of our Old Testament Reading that the LORD’s house was a place intended for “the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD”; a place for “everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast My covenant”. ... “Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar”.
 - This is why the temple was constructed with a court for male Jews, a court for female Jews, and a court for Gentiles. And when a portion of the temple area was converted into a marketplace, it was the Court of the Gentiles that lost out. So, where would the Gentiles now be able to pray and worship?
- ✘ It’s so sad - the very place meant to be a house of prayer for all nations was now instead a money-making machine for the Jewish religious leaders and all who were a part of their greed.
 - This is why Jesus launched into significant action, clearing the temple grounds. He wanted all people – Jew and Gentile alike – to have access to His promised, earthly presence, especially since it was only going to be a matter of a few days and the temple curtain that separated mankind from God’s holy presence above the Ark of the Covenant would be torn in half at the moment of His death on Good Friday (Mt. 27:51). When that free access to the throne of God was finally achieved by the shedding of Jesus’ blood, Jesus wanted no barriers; no distractions; nothing to hinder the Gentiles, Jews and all people from approaching God and His grace.

II. Our Worship needs to be cleared of obstacles.

- ✘ This day of significant action on the part of Jesus sends an important message to you and to me as well today.
 - For we, too, can be tempted to turn the practice of our Christian faith into a means to line our pockets, to make our budget for the year. As important as our *People With A Purpose* journey is each year – that we just completed a little over a week ago, we must be very careful to remain true to God’s Word and His intention for the ministry of His Church.

- It is so easy for us to give budgets and offerings, income and expenses such a high priority that we could end up losing sight of the real reason we're doing what we're doing as a congregation in God's Church.
- ✘ So these are important questions to ask ourselves over and again: Do we view new people to the church with joy; as people like us, who need to be fed with God's gifts of Word and Sacrament? Or do we, at least in part, welcome them with the thought in the back of our mind that, "hey these people can help us make our budget"?
- Or anytime that we consider some kind of fundraiser, are we doing it with the purpose of serving our community with the Gospel and love of Christ, or are we more so looking for a way to lighten the amount of our own offering and faithful support of Christ's ministry here and around the world?
- ✘ Now let me be clear – I am not saying that we shouldn't have a budget and that we shouldn't plan and make financial projections, but we must be on guard to keep our priorities straight. Budgets should exist only to serve ministry, not the other way around!
- You see, the money-changers and the vendors who sold animals for sacrifice placed a real obstacle in the way for people, especially Gentiles, to be able to worship God. In fact, the way they had things set up, they made it all but impossible for the Gentiles to be able to pray and worship in the temple courts at all.
- So, another question for us: are there any obstacles to the worship of God in your own life at this time? Are there barriers that are self-inflicted – that are attached to your lifestyle or any out-of-place priorities? Are there hindrances that someone else has put in place, perhaps even someone close to you? Or, are you possibly placing obstacles or limitations to worship in the lives of others who really want to worship faithfully?

III. Jesus' significant action for us.

- ✘ Just as it was that first Holy Week, so it is with you and me today. Jesus would like nothing more than to take significant action in your life by overturning and driving those obstacles out of the way so that you can receive from Him His precious gifts of Word and Sacrament.
- It was a significant action that Jesus took on that Monday of the original Holy Week. It definitely got the attention of the chief priests and the scribes as, verse 18 says that they responded by "seeking a way to destroy Him".
- ✘ Yet, His action on Monday would pale by comparison to the significant action Jesus would take for you and me and for all people at the end of Holy week.
- It was not vendors and animals that He then drove from the temple court. No. Instead, He drove sin, death, and the devil from their place of ruling and dominating over people's lives. Yes, that loving action by Jesus is what drove out the very thing that seeks to separate us from God, namely, our own sin.
- ✘ And the benefits of that action by Jesus He has now given to you as a free gift on another wonderful day – a very significant day in your life: the day of your Baptism.
- It's on that day that the Holy Spirit worked miraculously through water and God's Word to call you and bring you to faith. On that day He took action to wash away all of your sin; to claim you as a child of God; and to make you an heir of everlasting life. What a day of significant action on God's part, indeed!

Conclusion

- ⌘ As Mark told us, the religious leaders were not pleased with the action Jesus took on Monday of Holy Week. It certainly put a crimp in their business scheme.
 - ➔ By the end of Holy Week, they will think that they actually accomplished their goal of destroying Jesus so that everything could simply return back to the way it was before.
- ⌘ But before we get to that, we still have more significant things to explore and understand about these “Three Significant Days” of Holy Week. Join us next week and we’ll do just that, to the glory and praise of Jesus. Amen.