

God's House  
John 2:13-22

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the words of my mouth and the ears of our hearts be open to the word of God this day. AMEN.

Short pop quiz for you today, just to get you thinking? Only one question - where are you? Don't answer too quickly. Look around, examine where you are; look at the people around you; look at the symbols and structures of the furnishings that surround you. Look at what is in your hands, what you're sitting on, what your feet rest upon. Look up and see the roof, the walls, the Lenten banner that covers the wall or the St. Mark Symbol Banner over on that wall, do you see the large stone altar, the slate chancel area with the wooden rails, the pulpit of the Word, the baptismal font, the choir loft, the stained glass, the large cross. Hopefully all these things would give you a clue? Do you know yet where you are? Yes, you are in the house of the Lord.

This is not your property, this is not your home, this is not your room, this is not your seat. This is the House of the Lord. We are simply guests of God that gather here for one purpose – to worship with full respectful devotion before the Lord Almighty. This is God's house. Welcome to the house of the Lord.

Now doesn't that seem pretty silly having to say that? But I think every once in a while we have to remember this fact, that this is God's house, where people come to worship God. Yes some of the side benefits of being part of the family of the congregation is the fellowship, the dinners, the opportunities of learning for youth and adults, the sharing of friendships, the prayerful spiritual and physical support of each other as fellow members. But once in a while we have to stand back and remember why we come here, why St. Mark exists is to be a house of the Lord. To be a place where people come to meet God in worship with reverence and full respect due his Glory, to be filled with the grace of God and go forth renewed with the passion of Christ to all the world.

In our Gospel reading Jesus was driving home this very reminder to the people of his day. Right here in the beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus enters the temple and encounters such a scene of lack of respect, of shame, of disregard for the purpose of the temple, that it drove him to do an extreme action. It was the time of the Passover - one of the three annual festivals - where Jerusalem would be filled to overflowing with religious pilgrims coming to celebrate. Passover was the festival to remember the great deliverance that God had granted the Israelites in the exodus from Egypt. It was a time to look forward to the sacrifice of the sacrificial lamb, the Savior that was to come. For over a thousand years the Jews had been worshipping this very festival. And

somewhere along the line someone got the wise idea, “since all these foreigners, pilgrims, and travelers need ceremonially clean sheep, doves, and cows, why not set up a market right at the temple?” That way they don’t have to bring them with them from such a great distance. The temple was filled with cows and sheep, birds and lambs penned up right in the house of God - with the smell and noise just running rampant. Then put on top of that, many Jews would take this opportunity to pay their annual temple tax, which the temple authorities insisted had to be paid with a certain silver half shekel coin (since the money they brought had heathen inscriptions on it). And so Jewish moneychangers set up shop right in the temple, where for a price they would exchange the Roman or other coins you had in your pocket for the silver coins of the temple. Clanging money, haggling over the prices or the scales, the animals mooing, sheep baaing, families going here and there, people up and about everywhere, the noise the smells, the crowds, how in the world was worship truly being done in all respect in this place? It wasn’t, that is the point.

Do you remember what God told Moses when he approached the burning bush? “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” God wanted Moses to have a sense of reverence and awe - for he was standing on holy ground! Yet here they were allowing cows to run rampant on God’s holy ground! The teachers of the Law were allowing money changers to use God’s house as a means for personal gain. They had turned his house into a den of robbers. What was worse was that nobody did anything about it! They were more concerned about the bottom line - what will make money! What will be easiest for the visitors and for me! They never thought to ask, “what will glorify God!”

What a breath of fresh air - literally - it must have been - when Jesus made a whip and then sent the cattle and sheep out of the temple and all the money changers! Jesus knew that not only was this distracting the worshipers, but it was also disrespectful for the holiness of God. He had the right to be upset. Just imagine if someone brought a cow into your living room and let it go on your floor! Imagine if someone set up a business inside your front door to swindle anybody that came to visit you out of their money? Wouldn’t you have the right to be angry as well? If you look at the scene through the Savior’s eyes, you can understand why he made a rope of cords and started swinging it with the words: “take these out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” How refreshing it must have been for Jesus to put these sinners back in their place.

Wouldn’t it be refreshing for such an attitude to be prevalent in today’s society as well? Even within the church it seems most often the worry is about the bottom line - and what will pay the bills - what will make people comfortable. Hardly ever do people stop and consider, “is this respectful of God, is this place and time and worship giving God his glory and honor”.

What about you all, how do you evaluate your worship time? After returning home from church on Sunday morning, do you ever find yourself saying, "I didn't like that service. I didn't know any of the hymns. There was too much noise I could hardly concentrate. The pastor's sermon was way too long and boring. And, my goodness, I wonder why the hymns were so slow or so fast, so quiet or so loud"? If you ask all these questions, then what is your mind centered on? Who's at the center of that view of worship? I am, me myself and I. What I think of worship is what matters. That's the attitude of much of this world. That's the attitude toward worship that Jesus condemned in ancient Jerusalem and still condemns today.

And the truth is we all do it. I even ask Shellene every week, "How worship was", because I like to hear her opinion of the morning. She sees things I don't. She notices stuff I may have missed. But seldom do we ask each other if worship was a time of glorifying and honoring God?

The worship, the praising and giving thanks to God is the central part of why we are a church. And now during this Lenten season it is good to take a moment and remind ourselves that we are in the house of God and what that means for us as servants, as visitors, as guests in God's house.

Yes this church building is used for many purposes, we have dinners, offices, scouts, and meetings, and various activities in here. We have a narthex filled with sign-ups and announcements that are not all centered on worship. We even make announcements at the beginning of worship like mini-commercials. These are all apart of who we are as a fellowship of members. But when we turn in the prelude to begin to worship, we leave all those things behind, we turn our hearts to God and our minds to the Word and the praising in glory for all God's grace. When we do that then this place, this time, the people gathered here, and the music, the structure and the furniture and the words spoken are to all be about God, giving God glory and honor.

So where are you today? Mentally, physically, spiritually where are you today? Right now? Are you in worship, are you in the house of the Lord, praising God and giving thanks for Jesus Christ who gives us the forgiveness of sins and promises us a place before that everlasting throne in the great worship to come. Today remember this is not your property, this is not your home, this is not your room, this is not your seat. This is the House of the Lord. We are simply guests of God that gather here for one purpose – to worship with full respectful devotion before the Lord Almighty. This is God's house. Let us Praise the Lord this day. Amen.

May the peace and Grace of God be with you this day and throughout the week to come. AMEN.

Let us pray for the whole people of God in Christ Jesus, and for all people according to their needs.

Almighty God, you have fulfilled the promise made so long ago in the gift of your Son, who came not to be redeemed but to redeem, not to be saved but to save. He came as the sacrificial lamb who offered himself up for the sins of all humanity. To change our hearts and minds, to cleanse us from all things that take us away from you. To make us worship and honor you in all your glory. We give you thanks for this gift of this blessedness.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer..

O Heavenly Father, we ask that you bless us with the mind of service, to be like the sacrificial lamb who gave of himself so all might have life. Allow us to follow in his footsteps, to overcome hatred, and division, to seek your path of service and discipleship. Allow us to come to your

waters of baptism and your table of Holy Communion and leave renewed and energized for your work in this community and beyond.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, Hear our Prayer.

God, send your comforting spirit to descend upon this world and guide nations and leaders to come to understand and know of your ways of peace. Hold this world in your ever caring hands Lord, and mend broken hearts, overcome hardships of disasters and diseases. Lord grant comfort to those in mourning so they may see the light of your everlasting kingdom. Grant your spirit of healing to those who are torn down by sickness, or troubled by despair, be with all those who are alone, forgotten, homebound and be with all those we lift up in our prayers to you now....

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray for your church universal and all of your faithful people, teach us to use the many gifts you have given us for the up building of your body of faith, to worship you and to go forth as your witnesses to our community and beyond. Make us all your workers of your will in all that we do.

LORD IN YOUR MERCY, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, o Lord we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.