

John 2:13-22

3rd Sunday in Lent

March 26, 2000

Most of the time ^{can} I get so wrapped up in the business of the church, with the busyness of the church that I forget all about God. How the church is doing seems the agenda. Numbers are the measure. Dollars. Attendance. Members.

When I am asked to report about the year that has been no one asks, "Are you praying?" How many were in worship, how often, how much did they give? And these have nothing to do with God because God cannot be measured. Nor can faith, nor hope, nor love.

When Jesus entered the temple, drove out the cattle and the sheep, overturned the tables of the money changers, told those with doves, "Take these things out of here!" he was attacking all the business, the busyness.

"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

But the business and the busyness always come back in. Back into the temple, back into the church, back into my heart.

It is no accident that Jesus' first trial was before the Sanhedrin – the priests and the religious leaders. For Jesus was attacking everything that organized religion wants to do. It would be a mistake to think that if they just had followed the rules better down at the temple that everything would have been fine for in Jesus God was doing a new thing.

Jesus points to this new thing in his words, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body, he would be destroyed – killed – but the Father would raise him up once more. ^{and} But some of the gospels teach us that when Jesus' body was destroyed that the temple curtain was torn in two from top to bottom.

God left organized religion with its business and busyness behind. God went out and found a new temple.

You. When Jesus was raised and breathed his spirit his followers became the place where God dwells on earth. In you, in your body. You are the house of God, you are the place where your neighbors will encounter God. *the place where God is worshipped: you,* Not just you – an individual – but you – a people, a body of Christ.

I think of what the police in some cities have discovered. For a while policemen were not walking the beat through the neighborhood. They were in cars, they were at the station. People went to find them, called them. It did not work.

Lately the police have been assigned to walk among the people once more, to be a face that is recognized, a person who knows the names of the children who play. Neighborhoods are being changed.

In Christ God sends you out on the beat – to be God's presence among the people on your street, to bring prayer and faith and hope among them, with them. The action is not here – but wherever you are.

There is danger when we read the story of Jesus driving out the moneychangers and the animals, or Jesus in conflict with the religious leaders that we will think that the problem is they were not good enough. If they had been more sincere, more holy, more faithful he would have been happy with them.

But Jesus is doing a new thing. Always a new thing.

How can we measure this new thing? We can't. But when you are believing and trusting and following and loving and serving and forgiving and rejoicing God is in the middle of it all. And when I tempt you into counting and measuring and thinking numbers can tell us the story of God in this place, Jesus will go looking for his whip once more.

Too often I forget. Busyness and business take precedence over God. But God has promised there is only one measure he will use on you and me and every neighbor we will meet, that measure will be Jesus' arms stretched out in love. *That is the only measure God knows - Jesus' arms stretched out in love.*