

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity – Pr. Faugstad sermon
St. Luke 19:41-48: “Learning from Our Lord’s ‘House Rules’”
August 13, 2023 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Merciful God, heavenly Father, we heartily ask You, that You would so govern us by Your Holy Spirit that we may not neglect the time of Your gracious visitation, nor by impenitence fall into temporal and eternal punishment, but in this our day lay hold on the things that make for salvation and everlasting peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, companion altar book for *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 151)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

And when [Jesus] drew near and saw the city, He wept over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” / And He entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house shall be a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a den of robbers.” / And He was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on His words. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Joh. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who opens wide the door to His beautiful home, so that sinners have a place of refuge and rest, dear fellow redeemed:

“Close the door behind you!” “Take off your shoes before you walk on the carpet!” “Clean up after yourself!” These are some common “house rules,” and I imagine all of us have other rules that are unique to our own homes. We have these rules because we want to preserve our homes and make them comfortable places to live.

In today’s reading, Jesus highlights some “house rules” of His own. We see how concerned He is to keep the temple in Jerusalem clean. When He was a twelve-year-old, and Mary and Joseph found Him with the teachers in the temple, He asked them, “*Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?*” (Luk. 2:49). And now, just a few days before His death on the cross, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 56, “*my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples*” (v. 7).

He quoted this passage because of what the temple wasn’t at that moment. It wasn’t “*a house of prayer*”; instead it had become a marketplace. This was not something new. Three years earlier

when Jesus was first beginning His public work, He found the same thing—people selling oxen, sheep, and pigeons, while others dealt in money exchange. With righteous zeal, He overturned tables and drove out the sheep and oxen with a whip of cords. *“Take these things away,”* He cried; *“do not make my Father’s house a house of trade”* (Joh. 2:16).

His message hadn’t changed three years later when He overturned the tables again and *“drove out all who sold and bought in the temple”* (Mat. 21:12). The evangelist Mark describes how He not only cleared the space but also guarded it: *“he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple”* (Mar. 11:16). This is an instructive account for anyone who likes to turn Jesus into an effeminate pushover, a loving teacher who just wants everyone to feel good about themselves.

No, Jesus was a Man of sharp conviction, of resolute purpose, of perfect focus. His clearing of the temple those two times is not an example of Him momentarily “losing His cool,” or acting outside of His character. It is an insight into His character, and it is instruction about what matters to our Lord.

“My house shall be a house of prayer,” said Jesus, *“but you have made it a den of robbers.”* What Jesus wanted was humble sacrifice. What He saw was total selfishness. What He wanted was godly devotion. What He saw was a den of robbers, totally secure in their sin in the very place that was consecrated for holiness.

The fact that the temple had gotten just as bad as it had been three years before makes it seem like Jesus was fighting a losing battle. And besides that, Jesus knew that this was the week when He would complete His mission of salvation in obedience to His Father’s will. Why bother with the temple at this moment when seemingly more important things were about to take place?

For Jesus, this was the most important thing at the moment. This was no regular old building. This was the place of God’s presence, where He descended in all holiness to bless His chosen people. If this space was not sacred, then no space was sacred. And if no space was sacred, then the people had no communion with God. *“My house shall be a house of prayer.”*

“A house of prayer,” though, sounds like work. Is that all the people did there—come and offer their prayers to God in silence? Not at all. God directed the temple to be built for what He could *give* His people, not for what He could *get* from them. That is what our churches are for too. They were built many years ago as sacred places set apart for God to meet us sinners with His gifts through the preaching of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments.

We expend a good amount of time and money to maintain these places. We do this because we think our churches are beautiful, and we want to keep them in good shape. But if that was our only motivation, we might as well turn our churches into museums and get them listed on the register of historic places. The reason our churches exist, the purpose for which they were dedicated, is because God is at work here.

As beautiful as we might think our churches are, they are nowhere near beautiful enough to welcome the Almighty God of heaven and earth. Even if we gathered together all the riches of the world and adorned one church with all of it, it would not be a good enough space for the

God of glory. And yet, He still meets us here. He comes not only into our buildings, humble as they are, but He even comes into our hearts.

Is your heart a more or less fitting space than your church? The beginning of our reading speaks about Jesus looking out over the city of Jerusalem and weeping. The city was beautiful enough, perched impressively on Mount Zion with the temple occupying the prime location. But Jesus wept because the people of the city did not know Him. They did not believe His Word. They did not believe that He was the Messiah who had come to save them. *"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes."*

He predicted the destruction of this beautiful city, which happened about forty years later in 70 A. D. just as He described. At that time, the magnificent temple which Jesus took such care to cleanse, was burned to the ground. It happened on August 10, which is why this reading always falls in the month of August. All these things are given as a warning to us.

How the city and the temple looked on the outside isn't what mattered to God. Scribes and Pharisees who mechanically did what the Law required is not what He wanted. He wanted humble hearts of faith that trusted His promises. King David wrote by inspiration, *"For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise"* (Psa. 51:16-17).

Jesus wanted a clean temple, so it could be a sacred place for prayer and for hearing His teaching. He wants your heart to be clean for the same purpose, for hearing His Word and responding in prayer. So is your heart clean? If it were perfectly clean, we would not have to join David in saying, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me"* (Psa. 51:10).

Our hearts are like the temple. It does get cleaned from time to time, but then it gets cluttered again. It gets cluttered with worries, with doubts, and especially with our sins. We are no different than the *"den of robbers"* that Jesus found doing business in the temple. Like them, we are often on the lookout for what is best for us, even if that is not beneficial to our neighbor. Or like them, we become secure in our sins, and we stop seeing how bad they are or what damage they do to our faith.

This is why Jesus calls us regularly to hear His Word in His holy house. Through the Law, He needs to confront the sin that we have allowed to creep into our hearts, first along the shadowy edges and then right out in the open, like those merchants in the temple. He exposes that darkness to the light, so that we stop trying to hide our sins away but instead own them and confess them.

A repentant heart is a heart that is ready to receive the eternal gifts of God. Our Lord does not despise a broken and contrite heart, no matter what sin you have committed. He supplied on your behalf the life of godly devotion and humble sacrifice that God required. He creates in you a clean heart, washed clean by His holy blood and filled up with His perfect holiness. He gives you a heart that hangs on His every Word and loves to help the neighbors He has given you to serve.

His “house rules” of repentance and faith do not apply just to that temple in Jerusalem or just to our church buildings today. These “house rules” apply everywhere we are and in everything we do. Jesus did not cleanse the temple—and He does not cleanse our hearts—because He wanted to do something for Himself. He does these things for our good, for our blessing. He wants to preserve us in the saving faith and give us the comfort of His forgiveness and peace.

Even though we have many times sold out to the ways of the world and bought into the devil’s temptations, Jesus has not given up on us. He forgives us just as He forgave the men who conspired to kill Him and who nailed Him to the cross. We know that some of them later came to faith by the gracious working of the Holy Spirit.

Our God is patient with us. This is why Jesus wept over Jerusalem and cleansed its temple. Our merciful Lord does not wish *“that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance”* (2Pe. 3:9). He promises to do His gracious work among us as long as we are guests in this world of His creation. He will continue to beautify our places of worship with His holy presence, teaching us, forgiving us, and comforting us through His Word until the day of His joyful return.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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