

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Quincy, IL  
Rev. Martin Eden

Lent 3  
Saturday, March 2, 2024, at 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, March 3, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

# “Overturning Tables”

John 2:13-22

I have mentioned on numerous occasions in sermons and Bible classes, we have principles of Biblical interpretation (called hermeneutics), that is, the guidelines that we use to interpret the Bible. There were 20 of them we had to memorize. Fear not, I am not going to list them all for you. But there are good rules, such as, we do not allow people’s opinions or any outside evidence to stand in judgment of God’s Word. Holy Scripture is the sole legitimate source and norm (i.e. standard) of teaching/of truth. Therefore a person would not be allowed to say, “I don’t care what the Bible says, this is what I think” or “Socrates says, or sciencenerd.com says, ‘such and such’ therefore we can call God’s Word into question.”

But the greater application of these rules comes into play when we look at how Christian people who all read the same Bible come to remarkably differing views of what the Bible says. There are many churches that say there is no forgiveness of sins offered in Baptism. Many churches say that the body and blood of Christ is not present in Holy Communion; even though Jesus says, “This is My body...This is My blood.” And even though St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians

chapter 11 that “anyone who does not recognize the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment upon himself,” there are many people who interpret Christ’s words very differently and reject Jesus’ statement, “My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink.”

When we spend time discussing the differences between Confessional Lutherans and other church bodies, the question is often asked, “Do we really need to emphasize other church’s weaknesses or differences? Can’t we just focus on building ourselves up?”

I believe that it is important to make it very clear that as long as a church confesses the One True God to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and salvation coming through the death and resurrection of Christ, they are God’s people. And when we point out that a Christian person or a Christian church may be teaching something that is in error and contradicts God’s Word, we are to strive not to do it with hatred, malice, contempt, or with the intention to harm that person or institution.

When we point out a false teaching, we need to do it in the same spirit in which Christ cleared the temple. You may say, “Wait a minute. We are supposed to act the way that Christ did in the temple? But I thought you said we are to strive not to do it with hatred, malice, or contempt?”

Christ’s anger was not the result of hatred, malice, or contempt. It was righteous anger born out of love specifically directed at those who had taken up the mantle of authority. Just like when St. Paul harshly criticized the Corinthian church for bad communion practices, he did it not to punish them, but he did it to protect them and to help them. The people in Corinth were eating and drinking

judgment upon themselves and were therefore doing great harm to their spiritual well-being. It would have been a selfish, unloving act for St. Paul to take the easy road and just look the other way and let the people do communion in whatever way they wanted to do it.

The people who were in the temple changing money and selling animals could justify themselves as providing a necessary service to the crowds who had come to offer sacrifices. They were doing this in the service of the High Priest. These are noble and honorable jobs, they could claim. Reality is: they were desecrating the temple of the Lord and were therefore also doing great harm to their spiritual well-being and the well-being of their “customers.”

Christ sees this and is deeply grieved. He is concerned about preserving His Father’s house and the truth of the Word of God. He is concerned about the poor people who are being led astray and thus are being robbed of their salvation – let alone their money.

He also tells us that He came into this world to wield a sword and cut away all that is evil. Scripture describes God’s Word as a sword that cuts deep separating even bones and marrow.

When Christ rampaged through the temple, the people witnessed what was meant when God told Moses on Mt. Sinai: “I the Lord your God am a jealous God.” Jealousy is the desire to keep what is rightfully yours. Our Lord is very jealous of anything or anyone that steals the hearts of His people. We belong to Him.

For the love of His people, Christ did everything that He could to preserve the integrity of His Father’s house and to preserve His people from being led

astray from the truth. As you read the Gospels, notice the difference in how Jesus deals with people. Ordinary sinners, He comes to with mercy and compassion recognizing that they are like sheep without a Shepherd.

To the Jewish leaders who were claiming and exercising authority, Jesus pulls no punches. He calls them hypocrites, “white-washed sepulchers – pretty on the outside, but filled with dead men’s bones.” These men had stepped into the arena and had declared themselves to be Christ’s opponent.

When we are confronted with people who hold different beliefs, especially when dealing with Christian people, everything that we say and do needs to be done out of love. If someone disagrees with you concerning the Word of God but they have not “stepped into the arena” as a person with authority or claiming authority, be a gentle shepherd and guide them with mercy and compassion.

When we attempt to correct someone’s error or call out the foolishness of the so-called wisdom of this world, we dare not do it for the purpose of making ourselves look good. As fun as it is to be snarky and sarcastic, those are poor tools for building the Kingdom.

I find the constant need to ask God for patience and for the wisdom to know when to overturn the tables once someone has stepped into the arena, because sometimes overturning the tables is the right answer. But we also see from the words and deeds of our Lord, sometimes the right answer is to remain silent before our accusers and say nothing except “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Therein lies the challenge for us as we preach Christ crucified amid the stumbling blocks and foolishness of this fallen and redeemed world. Amen.