

## Mission Reflection

*for the Season of Lent*

Seafarers International House



### Scripture

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.<sup>1</sup>

### Message

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus likens the temple as a den of robbers, but as Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary has explained, in the Gospel of John, Jesus is not quibbling about dishonesty or mismanagement of the temple officials. Jesus, instead is calling for the complete dismantling of the entire temple system.<sup>2</sup> That, in turn, begs the question, if the temple isn’t necessary, where is God?

Isn’t that prescient! How do the dwindling faithful support the growing burden of occupying and maintaining their temples? The answer, of course, is not very successfully. Is it possible that God is not in church building and if not, just where is God?

The Gospel makes clear that Jesus is the temple. In the crucifixion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, God is revealed. The revelation is a little mysterious, a little opaque, and not always clearly seen. This may explain why the faithful are so focused and preoccupied with their church buildings. On Sunday mornings we imagine God is present in the magnificent structures we’ve erected to glorify God (and, truth be told, ourselves as well). We’re comfortable in the sanctuary and the pews. The problem is that all too often, our comfort leads to

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our complacency. When that happens, our worship attendance becomes optional, our stewardship falls off, and eventually, we lose our focus and even our interest in knowing God. “[W]e ignore the radical, unbelievable claim of the Word made flesh.”<sup>3</sup>

If we want to find God, we need to get out of our pews and outside the church. We are assured that we’ll find God in the hungry we feed, the thirsty we refresh, the homeless we house, the immigrant we welcome, the destitute we clothe and the prisoner we visit. The circumstances in which we will find these people likely will be outside our comfort zones. But that’s where God will be waiting for us. It can’t get much more comfortable than that.

### Prayer

Lord, you asked Jonah to go to Nineveh, and ask us to travel beyond our homes and church buildings to be the hands that do your work. We’re told that you traveled with Jonah and we are assured that you will travel with us. We ask the Holy Spirit to guide and encourage us to see you in the face of our neighbors in need. Amen.

1. John 2:13-22
2. Karoline Lewis, *Commentary on John 2:13-22, WORKING PREACHER, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN*
3. *Ibid*

**Postscript:** In the best Lutheran tradition, Seafarers International House eschews expensive mission monuments. Our Guesthouse is not five-star, but it’s friendly, clean, affordable, and serves as a home away from home for merchant seafarers, a place of safety and comfort for asylum seekers and other vulnerable immigrants and an opportunity for you, through your patronage, to sleep well by doing good. Our mission outreach to merchant seafarers doesn’t involve fancy seafarer centers. It’s confined to port chaplains and vans parked alongside the ships, ready to offer onboard pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer. It’s in the faces of these seafarers and immigrants that we are blessed to see God. Log onto [www.sihnyc.org](http://www.sihnyc.org) for more information.

Seafarers International House is the Lutheran response to the urgent needs of vulnerable seafarers and immigrants. We offer pastoral care, hospitality, social assistance, advocacy and prayer in the ports in Baltimore, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, and in an 84-room Guesthouse in Manhattan. The Guesthouse accommodates more than seafarers and immigrants. It’s available for church gatherings, civic groups and individuals in need of safe, affordable lodging. Our Guesthouse helps them accomplish their mission goals, and their patronage helps us accomplish ours. “Sleep Well By Doing Good.”

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