

**LENTEN SERIES 2019**  
**SEVEN DAYS TO GLORY: Holy Week**  
**First Presbyterian Church**

**Week 1—"Monday: Robbers in the Narthex"**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this Lenten Series, we will explore the particulars of each day during what we know as "Holy Week"—the seven days to Easter following Jesus' Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem. The writer follows the chronology as recorded in Mark's gospel.

We will start with Monday ...

**Scripture:**

Matthew 21:12-17

Mark 11:15-19

Luke 19:45-48

John 2:13-25

For context, Jesus' own Holy Week journey began with what we call *Palm Sunday*—with his triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day as the talk of the town. Folks waved their palm branches and they sang their alleluias. They shouted their hosannas and they called him their King. The people believed Jesus was none other than the prophesied seed of Kings David and Solomon, the one destined to be Israel's king and ruler—the Messiah (see Psalm 118:19-27). But, the tide turned so quickly early that week as his journey took a very unexpected turn—the cleansing of the temple (or as I like to call it, "Jesus' 'temple-tantrum'").

Matthew—entered temple on Palm Sunday

Mark—entered temple Monday, probably in the morning

Luke—entered temple on Palm Sunday

John—entered temple after the wedding at Cana

- ✦ Mark's gospel records that, after having returned to Bethany at the end of the Palm Sunday events (presumably for a good night's rest),
  - the next day Jesus and his disciples went back to Jerusalem and entered the temple, where Jesus proceeded to do the most confounding thing imaginable—
  - for there Jesus was, the talk of the town, turning over tables and chairs, and screaming who knows what at people.
- ✦ His actions that day not only disrupted trade and traffic in the temple, it also challenged the ruling priests with very troubling words (Mark 11:15-18).
- ✦ Jesus proclaimed to them all, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers" (v.17).

- ✦ I'll bet no one saw that coming from such a seemingly humble, mild mannered rabbi!
- ✦ For years, I have called this interesting episode Jesus' "temple-tantrum."
- ✦ But, it was so much more than throwing a simple hissy fit.

### **WHAT DID GOD INTEND FOR THE TEMPLE?**

Let's take a look below the surface and explore what's really going on here ... and let's use the following question as our measuring stick for understanding Jesus—

- ✦ What does God intend?
- ✦ Now, imagine Jesus asking himself that question—what does God intend?—at every turn during his "temple-tantrum."

The first place in the temple area that Jesus would have set foot was in what was called the *Court of the Gentiles*. This was the **outer court** around the actual temple structure,

- ✦ it was the most crowded, inclusive place in the whole temple area,
- ✦ where people of all kinds of different nationalities would be invited to gather and pray to the one God.
- ✦ it was for anyone and everyone, and it's where the doubtful, the seeking, and the stranger (as well as the strongest believer) got their first impression of the temple.

Now, in addition to being more crowded than usual during times like the Passover, and being full of all sorts of different people, the outer court was also a **place of commerce**.

- ✦ This is where the moneychangers and the merchants were located with their tables and chairs.
- ✦ They were highly visible and highly necessary parts of the temple business system.
- ✦ And, it's important for us to understand the temple dynamics, especially the accepted rules and practices of Jesus' time.
  - During the Passover, there would have been a whole lot of out-of-town worshippers at the temple—
    - people who carried currency from other places around the Roman Empire,
    - and people who probably didn't bring their own animal or bird to sacrifice.
    - So the first thing people would need to do is exchange their unacceptable Roman coins with the Roman emperor's image, which would have been considered idolatrous, for acceptable temple currency.
    - Then the people would find a merchant to purchase their animal or bird to sacrifice with their new temple coins.

But, like so many things in life, it wasn't that simple and it certainly wasn't that clean.

- ✦ For starters, **the moneychangers and the merchants** were all licensed by the Jewish temple authorities,
  - and those authorities made sure to gain a large profit from the traders' activities.
- ✦ Secondly, the exchange of Roman currency to temple coins always included a "handling fee,"
  - and the issue wasn't so much the fee itself, it was the amount—
  - history records that some moneychangers took advantage of people, especially the poor and marginalized, and did their fair share of price gouging.
- ✦ Thirdly, people could technically have purchased their sacrificial animal of choice outside of the temple complex and brought it inside,
  - but official animal inspectors conveniently preferred animals to be purchased within the temple area,
  - and the prices were always higher inside the temple, sometimes double.
- ✦ The whole system was dirty, and the chief priests and scribes in charge of the temple were responsible for the whole mess.

And, so on the Monday before Easter, Jesus is there in the temple outer court, looking around at everything, and asking himself, "What does God intend for this place to be?"

- ✦ Did God intend for the sacred to become unsacred?
- ✦ Did God intend for the focus of the temple leadership to become so inward and self-serving, rather than the originally intended aspects of being outward, inclusive, and self-giving to all people, especially those on the margins?
- ✦ Did God intend for the merchants and moneychangers to go beyond providing vital services to exploiting their position as gatekeepers?
  - Because the reality was that anyone who wished to worship God had to deal with them first and become their customer.
  - One can imagine how they could quickly become so enamored with the profitability of their profession that they actually became obstacles for pilgrims to truly worship the one God.

They had become corrupt guardians of a true holy place—a place God intended to be open and inviting to all the peoples of the world.

- ✦ This is why I believe Jesus chose his words carefully that day—
  - quoting the prophet Isaiah describing King Solomon's original purpose for the temple—
  - that it would be a place where all God's people would be welcome to worship and pray (Isaiah 56:7).
  - Because Jesus was implying that the temple authorities of his day and time had failed to live up to their true calling.
- ✦ The temple had not become a place of prayer for the nations, but rather, to Jesus, it had become a "den of robbers" (Jeremiah 7:11)—
  - people Jesus considered to be akin to thugs, gangsters, outlaws, and brigands.
  - This was definitely not what God intended, as Jesus—God in the flesh—knew all too well.