

Zealous Worship
18 Jan, 2026
John 2:13-25
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This morning we move from the wedding at Cana into Jerusalem for Passover. We move from a rural Galilee to urban Jerusalem. From the margins of the empire into one of its busiest cities at the busiest time of year. We go from Jesus keeping the party going-gathering in the face of adversity; to the temple where Jesus lets the world know who he is.

We are, I think, more familiar with the beginning of Jesus' ministry as told in the Gospel of Luke, where he went home and preach a sermon that got him pushed to the edge of a cliff. That sermon where he proclaimed sight to the blind, release to the captive, healing to the sick, and jubilee for all. We are familiar with today's story, but through the lenses and time tables of Matthew, Mark, and Luke where it happens in the final week of his life and is the straw that sealed his death warrant; however here in John, it is his first action in front of the general public and is as much of a political statement as it is a spiritual one.

As I drop into my sanctified imagination, I imagine Jesus and his disciples on the journey from Cana to Jerusalem, them seeing how this fellow they are traveling with has been carrying some cords and fidgeting with them, braiding them and unbraiding them. They may have heard he was trained as a carpenter, so he just needs to keep his hands busy. They don't really know him that well.

I imagine Jesus and his disciples walking into the temple; a bustling and active place that he knew well having been there with his family, and having themselves possibly purchasing animals to sacrifice, as this was a common and accepted practice.

I imagine Jesus and his disciples stopping at the entrance. Observing what is going on. One of them sees his calm demeanor; his placid and peaceful face begin to burn bright as the mid-day sun. They jump back as Jesus pounces like a cat; the cords he had been carrying turned into a whip directing animals out of the temple. They see this quiet fellow who just did what his mother told him to now turning over tables; shackles sailing through the sky. Spittle spray as he screams: "Take these things out of

here. Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Their minds turning to the prayers of their childhood, the psalms of their worship "zeal for your house has consumed me." They know this prayer is for the endurance of things to come.

I imagine Jesus and his disciples; them stunned stock still, him standing in the middle of the now empty court the cords now at his feet, the task complete. I see him looking at his new comrades and they him. I see him wiping the dust from his hands walking toward them, past them. They follow him out of the gate where he is met by the leaders of the law. Flustered and enraged they shout at him: What have you done? You have no authority here. Comply with the rule.

I imagine Jesus and his disciples stand there; them terrified, him a rock upon the rock. He looks at them in studied silence for a moment. His eyes burning with the fire of Moses, Elijah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Amos; the fire of his ancestors in the faith who have stood in the face of power, and he begins to chuckle. An unnerving laugh to those who are threatening him; it is a holy laugh, "tear this temple down and I'll rebuild it in 3 days." He then kicks the dust off his sandals and begins the descent down the temple mount. His disciples following. The leaders of the law shout after him, "we have been building this for 46 years, how will you raise it in 3 days, " but Jesus and his disciples keep on walking as if they hadn't heard. His mission continued to the dismay of the leaders of the law as during this holies of weeks continued his zealous worship showing signs of the glory of God.

Last week Jesus changed the water into wine as sign that brought community together in the face of forces that seek to isolate and alienate. Today, Jesus entered into the familiar and upends everything. Jesus enters into the temple and squashes the status quo; he overturns the tried and tired ways in order usher in something all together new. Jesus says the old way of doing things just is not going to work anymore because the way things are working excludes and keeps people and the glory of God is for everyone.

I imagine that today Jesus and his disciples would walk into some of our churches he would see how they have become mouthpieces for power and havens for the haves...I imagine today Jesus and his disciples would walk into some of our churches and he would see how they close the door to

those who are in need and cast out those whose lives don't adhere to their human made mandates....I imagine that today Jesus and his disciples would hear the leaders of the law using the Word of the Lord to justify their military invasions and how they worship the red hat instead of follow the red letters; and I imagine that today Jesus and his disciples would not stay silent as the song of White Christian Nationalism crescendos. No, I imagine that Jesus and his disciples would be filled with holy Zeal and would turn over tables and chase out the schemers and the grifters and, yes, the blasphemers.

Beloved friends, just as Jesus was filled with Zeal for his Father's house; so are we to be filled with that holy fire. We, who have seen the signs of our savior, have been healed and redeemed; we who call ourselves disciples; we are to be filled with that holy fire and turn over the tables. We are to turn over the tables of injustice and inequity; we are to turnover the tables of racism and bigotry; we are to run over the tables of nationalism and isolationism; we are to turnover the tables and chase the fascists out.

We have a holy fire burning within us; us who still gather in the face of those who seek to destroy our communities; those of us who still gather when the leaders of the law call out comply or die. We have a holy fire, a zeal for worship, that burns brightest when the night is darkest. We have a holy fire that is the fire of resistance and redemption.

We are in a season where the leaders of the law want to extinguish that fire with their ICY grasp, but here's the thing, here's the thing they can squeeze as tight as they want, but that fire, and though at times it may dim to an ember, that fire does not go out, that fire melts the ICE. When we fight for justice, it sends holy breath on to that ember and that ember catches and it grows and it grows. When we are Zealous in our worship, the fire keeps on burning. And Justice will come.

At the beginning of what would become his final year on this earth, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, having won the victory of the Civil Rights Act, turned his attention from the results of injustice to the root causes of that injustice as he began in earnest to speak out against the ongoing war in Viet-Nam. Not only did he speak out against the war; he turned over the tables of the economy that underpinned such violence--even to the point of causing his allies to become afraid of his rhetoric. Echoing the opening line of the

opening statement of the Clergy and Laymen Concerned about Vietnam, warned that there is a time when silence becomes betrayal.

Standing there in the pulpit of our sister American (then northern) baptist church, the Riverside Church in NYC, he said, "Some of us who have already begun to break the silence of the night have found that the calling to speak is often a vocation of agony, but we must speak. We must speak with all the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak." Dr. King was so filled with the holy fire, the Zeal for his Father's house that he could not remain silent on the ongoing shadow of death that he upended even his own safety and security at a time when he could have chosen to lay low and rest on his laurels. He made the choice and the fire caught.

Jesus knew what he was doing when he went into that temple that day. It wasn't some spur of the moment decision. Jesus knew that the fire had been squashed to an ember, but he went into that temple and he gave it some holy breath. And the Bible says that during that passover festival many believed in his name because of the signs that they saw. When our world is crying out; we, beloved, are the body of Christ, we are the keepers of the fire; we are the showers of the signs, the fanners that flame, and, though they may use a different name, they will know that Love has come and love will win.