

Pastor Shaun Arndt

March 7, 2021

Sermon Text: JOHN 2:13-22

“A Cherished Picture “

*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory! Amen.*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

As you came through the door it hung on the wall straight ahead. It was a painting of Jesus with his disciples at the Last Supper. It was a cherished picture. Beneath that picture, the family once huddled and prayed as a tornado swept by 100 feet away, smashing several buildings on their farm, but by God's grace, not one shingle was missing on the farmhouse.

I've seen many similar cherished pictures of our Savior in believers' homes, some with stories like that one, some that are simply beloved reminders of our Lord's saving love for His people. Sometimes it is a picture of Christ on the cross, or as the Good Shepherd holding the lambs in his arms. Some treasure that picture of Jesus from the book of Revelation where he is standing and knocking at the door or Jesus blessing the little children.

But I've never yet seen a picture of Jesus from today's Gospel lesson hanging up in someone's living room. You know, a picture of Jesus with a deathly serious determination on his face, holding a whip in his hand, as he scatters coins, tosses over tables and drives sheep, cattle, buyers and sellers out of the temple courts! I've never seen that picture in someone's kitchen. And yet there are wonderful reasons for us to **cherish** this **picture** of Jesus in the Gospel today.

At first glance, the problem Jesus needed to clean up seems pretty obvious. **The Jewish Passover was near, so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables.**

The problem was not entirely *the what*, but *the where*. Since **Passover** was one of the most important days in the Old Testament church year, there would be believers coming from all over the ancient world to worship the LORD at the temple. If you were travelling hundreds of miles from Greece or even just 50 miles from Galilee, it would be difficult to haul Passover lamb or other animal for offerings, so you would bring money to purchase one from such a marketplace. And for that you might need to exchange currency. So this was a needed service.

*But* it didn't belong in the Temple courtyards, a place for prayer and Bible study. Jesus himself taught there on a number of occasions. What's more, this market was most likely set up in the court of the Gentiles, the part of the temple set up for outreach, a place for non-Jews to learn about the one true God.

Just imagine the racket of these animals bleating and cooing? Coins clink and clang as they are weighed out. In these days a **place of business** would be filled with the sound of haggling over prices like is still common in marketplaces in other cultures. And let's be blunt, there would be a smell—animals and manure, flies. Fine for the county fair, but not for a place to learn God's Word!

But there was a bigger problem than the racket and clutter. The real problem was a heart problem that the priests and people could allow this in the first place.

A sinful heart problem that doesn't take God and His Word seriously, but gets bored with the holy and doesn't really care, and just starts going through the motions of worship. A heart that thinks as long as I show up, buy a sheep, I'm fine, I can just keep on doing whatever I want and pleases me and not really pay attention to the Lord.

It misses that what God wants is our hearts. He wants hearts that listen to His Word and repent, taking sin seriously and then taking refuge in God's good news of mercy and forgiveness, in His undeserved love and care. Hearts that renewed in God's gift of holiness are eager to live according to His Word every day.

So the problem went deeper than moneychangers and manure to sinful hearts that easily grow bored, lazy, apathetic and indifferent to God and His Word.

And there's where you and I come into this picture. Even if we've never brought smelly sheep or loudly haggled over breaking a \$50 in the back of church, yet we have the same naturally sinful, naturally self-seeking hearts of our whole fallen human race. The sinful nature within still troubles even as believers, so that we are not perfectly eager to hear or live the things of God.

We have hearts that can take the most beautiful worship (and I'm not talking about the hymn tunes) but what truly makes worship beautiful, that God comes to speak to us in His Word, this amazing and marvelous time when Christ himself draws near to His people in Word and Sacrament— and we can be bored with and lose interest in this miracle of God coming to us in His promises!

And so we, (pastors too), can put in our time in these chairs or tune in virtually and think that God will be satisfied. But just showing up won't save us!

What the Holy God requires is a perfectly devoted heart, that takes Him and His every Word seriously! And not just on Sunday, but in every way, in every aspect of life, putting God and neighbor first in heart, words and deeds, just as we heard in the commandments in our 1<sup>st</sup> lesson.

But instead of viewing those commands with nothing but unbridled joy and delight, that rotten sinful part of us is eager to resist what God wants, fearing we'll miss out on serving our favorite false god, that is, ourselves and what we want.

Put bluntly. Our sinful hearts stink—they stink worse than cattle droppings in the temple courts. Not a whip of ropes, but the fire of the almighty should fall upon us and drive us out of his presence into hell forever!

So thank God for what this **Cherished Picture** shows us. You see, Jesus came to do more than just cleanse the temple courts, He came to cleanse our hearts! Instead of driving us out eternally, Jesus draws us near to God now and forever by doing what we could never do!

Listen again to why Jesus did what He did: **His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."**

A thousand years in advance, Psalm 69 foretold that Jesus' heart was the opposite of our naturally sinful hearts. His heart and life was filled with a true holy, righteous **Zeal**, the very opposite of being bored or uninterested with what God says. **Zeal** means enthusiasm, ardor, passion, intensity, it is the opposite of the spiritual apathy, boredom and rebellion that often fills our hearts when we hear what God wants.

Jesus was perfectly devoted to His Father in heaven. God's will came first for Jesus just as the law requires. So it didn't matter what it would cost Him, how he might be persecuted or laughed at for putting God's honor first, Jesus was going to do the right thing.

Driving out the merchants, was no sudden outburst of anger. Remember, He sat down and made a whip out of rope first. This was calculated, perfect, heartfelt obedience to God. This was giving God and His commands the seriousness and attention of entire life worship, the very thing our sin keeps us from bringing.

Jesus also did this out of **Zeal**, a burning, eager desire to save us, just as God willed and designed! You see, to live with God we need an undivided, zeal filled heart and life for God just like the one Jesus had.

And now you have it, because God counts Jesus' holy heart and holy life as though it was your own. In baptism, God clothed you with the holiness Jesus lived every day in heart, in words, in deeds.

Jesus' **Zeal**, his eagerness for God's Words and Ways is counted as yours. His obedience is made your obedience, His perfect worship, is now your perfect worship. Christ gives what is His to all who trust in Him.

But what about the record of our sins, our half-hearted worship, our failures to take God and His commands seriously? Jesus' **Zeal** would see to that. Remember that **Zeal would consume Him**—quite literally, just as He said: **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body.**

As the Son of God and son of Mary, Jesus' body is the true **temple**, the place where God comes to meet with human beings to save them. He is the fulfillment of the temple, the High Priest, and the saving Sacrifice all in one—the One who brings sinners back to God.

Jesus' **Zeal** that led him to hold a whip would lead him to also be whipped by the soldiers before they took him to the “altar” of the cross! His burning desire to save us would carry him all the way to hell and death and then back again as He rose from the dead after **three days** later to prove He has opened the Kingdom of heaven to all believers!

Now I don't expect anyone to go out and buy a painting of Jesus cleansing the temple to put in their living room. But I pray you do see why we can call this scene from the Gospel **A Cherished Picture**.

In it, we see Jesus' perfect, steadfast love and eager obedience. We see Him doing everything needed to save us, no matter the cost to Himself!

See Jesus' determined devotion and **Cherish** His love that earnestly sought you and eagerly embraces you with the forgiveness He won for you. Amen.

*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

We confess our Christian Faith using the Meaning of the Second Article on page 8 of the worship folder.