

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus be yours this day. The title for today’s sermon is “What did Jesus do?” and is based on the reading from the Gospel of St. John, the second chapter. Let us pray...Amen.

Back in the 1990, there was a movement in parts of the Christian church to use the motto “What would Jesus do?”. People used the phrase as a reminder of their belief to act in a way that would demonstrate the love of Jesus through their actions. As good as this motto might be, a better question is to ask and focus on is “What DID Jesus do?”

As we heard in today’s Gospel reading: Jesus walked into the temple. While this could be the opening line of a corny joke, it was deadly serious. During the Passover, Jesus went up into Jerusalem and saw the desecration of His Father’s temple. So, in righteous anger, Jesus “**made a whip of cords, and drove the animals and the money changers out of the temple**”(John 2:15) thereby cleaning the trash out of the temple. Jesus took after the idols and the idolaters and chased them out of the God’s holy house. Asking the question here: “What would Jesus do?” An answer within the realm of possibilities is: “flipping tables over and chasing people with a whip.”

Jesus took the defilement of God’s temple personally. The temple was the place God, where He, promised to be with His chosen people, Israel. Yet what was going on in the temple was anything but that. Jesus knew the hearts and intentions of those in His Father’s house and He would not stand for it.

So, Jesus went in and cleaned house. But what happened there was much more than just chasing people out of the temple.

Consider the greater picture for a minute. Today’s text happens in the early stages of Jesus’ earthly ministry. It was time for the annual Passover celebration, so as a faithful Jew, Jesus went to Jerusalem as required.

But, when He went to the temple, Jesus was disgusted by what He found there. The temple courtyard had been turned into a marketplace! Merchants had set up shops selling pigeons, oxen, and sheep to the faithful who had come to Jerusalem from far-off lands. Money-changers were also there, changing foreign currency into local money, again, so the faithful could pay the temple tax of one-half shekel.

To have these things available to the foreign worshipers *wasn't* bad, because worship of the Lord demanded the people bring sacrifices in proportion to their wealth. (Something that continues to this very day!) And it was very impractical—if not impossible—for someone traveling a long distance to bring his own sacrificial animal. There needed to be *some* way for

those things to be acquired in Jerusalem. In the Old Testament, God had even given instructions for this kind of arrangement.

The problem was sinful people. The Sellers and money-changer had set up shop right in the temple itself, in what is known as the court of the Gentiles and had greatly inflated their prices. In doing this, the people had made the house of God into a stinking spectacle.

Think of it! The worshipers, as they passed through the courtyard on their way into the temple, were probably more focused on bargaining over the cost of the animals or bickering about the exchange rate for their foreign money than they were on singing entrance psalms and preparing their hearts for worship of the Lord God Almighty! It was a disgrace! Jesus easily recognized how guilty everyone was involved in all this trading. As Jesus came into the temple, the ugliness of sin was right out in the open and flaunted for all to see.

While some people today think Jesus was weak and soft, here Jesus demonstrated Himself to be a man of strength and action. He single handedly took on the whole lot of them! He took cords, made them into a whip, and drove the animals and merchants out of the temple, thus fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy that the Messiah would have “**zeal**” for the house of God (Psalm 69:9).

Again, for those who think of Jesus as a “softy,” think again! Not only did He take them all on, but also, according to the account before us, *not one* of the merchants even *dared* to stand up to Him! Neither did the temple guards, those entrusted to protect the temple and the assets inside.

Now, hearing this story, we don’t ask, “What would Jesus do?” because we clearly see “what Jesus did do.” He saw the impurity in the hearts of those insiders from the temple hierarchy and He busted them; He kicked them out in quick order!”

There’s no doubt this smelly spectacle of sweaty people and droves of animals being sold right within the house of the Lord was bad, but Jesus saw was even worse. He looked into people’s hearts. He saw through their duplicity, their hiding behind God’s instructions in order to make a fast buck. As bad as the scene and the smell *had* to be, the *spiritual* stench of the place—the lusting for money at God’s expense—*was worse!*

Jesus knew this, as John tells us, “**because he knew all people**” (v 24). Jesus *knew* their hearts and saw them for what they were—sinners through and through, more interested in making a few shekels than in honoring the Lord’s house.

But before we get self-righteous and say “We would never do that”, consider again the words before us: “[Jesus] **knew all people . . . for He Himself knew what was in man.**” The Lord

Jesus knows *all* and sees *all*. And, if He knows the hearts of the money- changers and animal purveyors, He knows *your* heart as well!

He sees *your real* attitude toward those Ten Commandments we heard as our Old Testament Reading! Although you might not be caught bowing down to a “carved image,” He sees your attitude toward the myriad of *other* things you allow to be foremost in your life—such as your work, your money, your family, your vacation, your \_\_\_\_\_. Jesus sees your attitude toward sins of the flesh, toward other people’s property, toward speaking well of all your neighbors.

Oh, yes, Jesus truly sees it *all*! Admit it: you—just like the temple merchants—you are one of the people rightly deserving to have Jesus take a whip and drive you out of His presence *forever*!

A commentator described why Jesus had to clean out the temple of what was happening. He writes: “The uncleanness in the temple demonstrates the corruption of the people and was an image of the impurity in their hearts. The conditions existing in the temple are therefore a testimony against the people. [Jesus’] blows [with the whip] struck at their hearts. And the cleansing is a picture of what must occur with the people to make it a holy nation acceptable to God. And what is more, this must be made to apply to the individual. The house of the heart must be cleansed if it is to be the temple of God” (Ylvisaker, 138–39).

Dear people of God, we, too, have a “spiritual stench,” and it’s *far* worse than the largest holding pen of sheep and oxen in a closed-up barn on a hot, humid summer day!

Yet, just like in the temple during the Passover celebration, when Jesus cleaned out those money changers and animal sellers, Jesus entered into your heart and cleaned it out. He chased out your old Adam (old sinful nature) and the devil. You didn’t invite Him in, nor did you choose Him: rather He stormed into you through your hearing of His Word and when you were baptized.

During this holy season of Lent, our Lord calls us to recognize our utter need for His cleansing, and re-cleansing of our hearts laden with sin. His right and just Law clearly shows us the enormity of our sins. Then through the gift of repentance and faith, Christ reaches out to us—to *you*—with His love, His mercy, His forgiveness, and His cleansing of your heart.

By the working of the Holy Spirit in and through God’s Word, He does cleanse “the house of [your] heart,” to wash it pure with the only cleaning agent that will get the “stench” out—Jesus holy, precious blood shed for you and the whole world!

About three years to the day after Jesus cleansed the temple, Jesus accomplished your salvation on the blessed cross of Calvary. “**Zeal**” for His Father’s house *drove* Him to cleanse the temple that fateful day, and “**zeal**” for you—zeal motivated by His eternal love—*drove* Him to the cross

and to His death to cleanse you, so that you could be a “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19)—your body and soul washed clean and pure, thereby making you to be a righteous one of His *forever!*

Going back to what I mentioned at the beginning about the problem with the motto, “what would Jesus do?” The problem is it puts the emphasis on us, our works, our actions, and our moral beliefs and pushes Jesus to the background. Yet, what makes a person a Christian is not holding to a particular set of moral beliefs; rather it is faith in Jesus Christ and His death and resurrection for you for your salvation. As such, being Christian is not a matter of behaving rightly; rather it is a matter of being forgiven and cleansed for behaving wrongly. While what we do is very important for our neighbour, what is much more, and eternally important, is what Jesus has already done for you and in you to cleanse your heart, to make you His own by His death, and to carry you on through His resurrection to eternal life in Him. It is holding to the faith given to you in the washing of renewal in your baptismal waters and the promise that you are now one of God’s very own, a forgiven and beloved child.

Rather than chasing you out of His eternal presence with a whip, Jesus eagerly walks toward you, always seeking to embrace you, inviting you to hear His Word and to dine at His Table, *regularly* here on earth and *eternally* with him in heaven! It is because of “what Jesus did do” and what He continues to do in you, with you, and for you that you are saved. As Jesus’ presence in the temple made the temple holy, so does Jesus’ presence in you, through His Word and Sacraments, make you holy. Here He cleanses your filthy hearts, He restores you, and He sanctifies you (*makes you holy*) by His presence as your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit and an important part of the body of Christ. “Take heart, and rejoice because of what Jesus did for you and continues to do for you. For that eternal gift, thanks be to God! Amen.

*\* This sermon belongs to Christ and His Church because it is taken from His Word. The general outline follows the sermon written by Rev. Ronald D. Rock for March 8, 2015 in Concordia Pulpit Review titled: ‘Because He Knew All People’. Please use this sermon and reference it accordingly. Should you decide to contact me, I would be very interested in knowing where you are. Please include the name of your city, province or state, and country when contacting me.*