

Sermon Transcript

Give Us A Sign!

I Corinthians 1:18-25 and John 2:13-22 | Third Sunday in Lent | March 3, 2024 | Deacon Nina Joygaard, preaching

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom.”

If you had to pick – where would you land? Would you base your faith on wisdom? What makes sense or has been proven? Something for which the evidence all adds up? You believe it because you’ve come to a reasonable conclusion with the information available.

Or maybe you’re more on the side of seeing signs? Your faith might be most impacted by the Holy Mystery, by seeing something that you just can’t NOT believe. You’ve been to the mountaintop or experienced something that is difficult to explain. And you just ... believe.

Our reading from I Corinthians gives us surprising insight to the challenging story from the gospel of John. Corinthians explains that Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom – but Christ’s cross - is in an entirely different **realm** than the power of signs or wisdom.

As we read in the gospel of John, very early ... like super early in Jesus’ ministry comes the cleansing of the temple. Before this: he’s met John the Baptist, called disciples to follow him, and turned water into wine. That’s it! This is only John 2, after all. So we find that one of the **very first things** Jesus does is join with other people of his Jewish faith community in preparing for one of the holiest celebrations – the Passover.



“Just as the season of Lent helps Christians prepare for Easter, Jews travelled to Jerusalem early in order to purify themselves for Passover (John 11:55).”¹ So Jesus is joining in the faith practices of his community, leading into the holy celebration of Passover. At the time of Passover, and at other special times - sacrifices were offered at the Temple in Jerusalem. “It was a place where human life and divine blessing met.”² The buying and selling taking place at the Temple was quite necessary for Jewish ritual worship. Depending on your economic status and the celebration – you would offer a financial gift or an animal sacrifice such as doves, a cow or a goat. If you have traveled far to worship in this holy place, how else will you be able to offer a

¹ Alicia D. Myers. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24.

² Mary Hinkle Shore. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24.

Sermon Transcript

pair of doves or a young sheep? This option really was necessary for the ways those of the Jewish faith were instructed to worship at the Temple. The marketplace actually made it possible for the faithful to “participate fully in the Passover.”³

Now, many of us have learned a very specific interpretation of this story ... myself included! It goes something like this... Jesus saw what was happening at the temple, got really angry and just smashed up the tables and stands selling animals. And you may have learned that Jesus was railing against the corruption of the temple economy here. “The other three gospels help us down the road to this conclusion. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus borrows from the prophet Jeremiah to **accuse** those who are selling things of making the temple a ‘**den of robbers**.’”⁴

BUT the gospel of John, in **THIS story**, there is a different spin on the cleansing of the temple. In **this** version, Jesus says nothing of robbers or thieves. At first glance, his actions may seem like an angry RE-action. And maybe they are ...

But I also wonder ... how long would it have taken Jesus to **make** a whip of cords after he found the people selling animals for ritual sacrifice in the temple?

John-scholar Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis challenges our assumptions about this scripture, saying, “I don’t know that Jesus is angry. I don’t know if there’s rage here. I don’t know if there’s criticism here. That’s more in the synoptics saying ‘stop making my house a den of thieves’ ... What Jesus is calling attention to is the location of God. God is **now enfleshed** and incarnated in Jesus.”⁵

So if we can step back – for just a moment - from what we maybe have been taught or have believed about this story and ask **this** question. **What if** this story has nothing to say about anger? It might... I’m not going to suggest that isn’t a valid interpretation.

But what if? What if, like Dr. Lewis and other scholars suggest - Jesus wasn’t really angry here? What if Jesus understood the Jewish culture inside and out and just **KNEW** that what the Jews needed was a **sign**? One of the very first things he could offer them...

³ Myers.

⁴ Mary Hinkle Shore. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24.

⁵ Karoline Lewis. Sermon Brainwave 772: Third Sunday in Lent (B) - March 7, 2021

Sermon Transcript



When he does this cleansing, this driving out of the buyers and sellers, which are actually required for Jewish ritual worship to function,⁶ the Jews say to him ... “What **sign** can you show us for doing this?” **A sign?**

Jesus **STANDING** before them replies “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

It’s not “destroy this temple” [gesturing to the vast worship space].

But “destroy **THIS** temple” [showing him his own body]

“And in three days I will raise it up.”

Jesus may be giving them **the sign** they are really after ... that is “bringing temple activity to a standstill in order to point to another holy place **altogether**.”⁷ Jesus. The long-awaited Messiah. The fulfillment of **all** the law and the prophets. The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. Holy God **embodied**. **The SIGN** of something so brand-new and unexpected and mystical, that it’s only later, when the disciples remembered this moment that they can even begin to explain it in a way that makes sense. God’s indwelling. The “Word made flesh” – the Word living among us. This is Jesus. The living, breathing, walking, speaking ... Temple of the Holy.

This is the one we are invited to worship. To turn away from our own sense of wisdom and influence. To point ourselves and our lives to God embodied. The one whose way is the cross. A path of foolishness to the wise. A stumbling block to those that demand signs – because the signs are too powerful to make sense. The way is beyond foolish to those who desire wisdom.

But this is Jesus. The **enfleshed** Holy One. God among us. Leading us to the cross.

⁶ Alicia D. Myers. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24. And Mary Hinkle Shore. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24.

⁷ Mary Hinkle Shore. Commentary on John 2:13-22. Working Preacher. Accessed 2/28/24.

Sermon Transcript

For “Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God” (I Corinthians 1:24) wrapped up into one.

So may you, dear ones, set aside your need for signs and wonders. Your desire for everything to add up and make perfect sense. And look to Christ on the cross – and just KNOW that what you need is Jesus. God **enfleshed** among us. The ultimate place of our praise, worship, wisdom, power, and all wonders. The Messiah.

Amen.