EVERY SPRING, WE TALK ABOUT A PROBLEM WE HAVE IN THE CHURCH.

IT’S NOT JUST THIS CHURCH.

IT’S A PROBLEM THAT EXISTS IN VIRTUALLY EVERY CHURCH & IT’S A DIFFICULT PROBLEM TO OVERCOME.

IT’S THE PROBLEM OF IGNORING A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE BIBLE BECAUSE OF THE WAY WE OBSERVE HOLY WEEK.

I’VE SAID IT SO OFTEN YOU CAN PROBABLY MOUTH THE WORDS ALONG WITH ME AS I SAY THEM.

WE MOVE SO QUICKLY FROM THE “HOSANNA’S” OF PALM SUNDAY TO THE “HE IS RISEN’S” OF EASTER
THAT WE GIVE NO THOUGHT TO ALL THAT LIES BETWEEN THE TWO.

IT’S TRUE, ISN’T IT?

A SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE ATTEND WORSHIP ON PALM SUNDAY & THEN ON EASTER THAN ON MAUNDY THURSDAY OR ANY OTHER SERVICES THAT MIGHT BE OFFERED DURING HOLY WEEK – WHETHER HERE OR ELSEWHERE.

THAT MAY NOT SEEM LIKE A BIG DEAL – BUT LET’S PUT SOME PERSPECTIVE ON IT WITH A STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE GOSPELS.

I DID SOME QUICK CALCULATIONS.

THERE ARE 89 TOTAL CHAPTERS IN THE FOUR GOSPELS.

OF THOSE 89 CHAPTERS, 25 OF THEM ARE DEVOTED TO THE EVENTS THAT TAKE PLACE DURING
HOLY WEEK – THE THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN JERUSALEM BETWEEN MONDAY & FRIDAY – BETWEEN THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY ON PALM SUNDAY & THE CRUCIFIXION ON GOOD FRIDAY.

I ADDED UP THE PAGES OF ONE BIBLE I HAVE AND THE FOUR GOSPELS HAD 201 TOTAL PAGES.

OF THOSE 201 PAGES, FIFTY OF THEM WERE DEVOTED TO THE EVENTS OF HOLY WEEK.

SO, BASICALLY, WE CAN CONCLUDE THAT 25% OF THE GOSPELS ARE DEVOTED TO FIVE DAYS IN THE LIFE OF JESUS THAT MOST OF US OVERLOOK ENTIRELY.

THIS YEAR, DURING LENT, WE’RE GOING TO TRY TO CORRECT THAT.
THIS YEAR, WE’LL SPEND THE SEASON OF LENT LOOKING AT THINGS THAT TOOK PLACE ON THOSE FIVE DAYS – MONDAY THROUGH FRIDAY.

WE’RE GOING TO ALLOW THE GOSPEL OF MARK TO BE OUR GUIDE AS WE DO SO AND WE’RE GOING TO USE MARK FOR TWO REASONS.

FIRST OF ALL, “MARCH IN MARK” SOUNDS BETTER THAN “MARCH IN LUKE” – OR JOHN OR EVEN MATTHEW.

SECONDLY, AND OBVIOUSLY MORE IMPORTANTLY, MARK IS THE ONLY GOSPEL THAT ACTUALLY GIVES US DIVISIONS BY DAY SO THAT WE CAN ACTUALLY DETERMINE FAIRLY CLOSELY WHAT TAKES PLACE ON EACH DAY OF HOLY WEEK.
WITH ALL OF THAT IN MIND, LET’S ENTER JERUSALEM ON MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK – THE DAY AFTER PALM SUNDAY.

THE PASSAGE WE’RE READING IS THE INNER PART OF WHAT’S KNOWN AS A “MARK SANDWICH” – SOMETHING MARK DOES WITH REGULARITY.

THERE’S SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS ON ONE SIDE (THE TOP SLICE OF BREAD) & IS CONTINUED ON THE OTHER SIDE (THE BOTTOM SLICE OF BREAD) WITH AN ENTIRELY SEPARATE EVENT IN THE MIDDLE.

THE BREAD PART OF THIS SANDWICH IS THE STORY OF THE WITHERING FIG TREE.

EVEN THOUGH – LIKE AN ACTUAL SANDWICH – THAT STORY HOLDS THE STUFF INSIDE TOGETHER – WE’LL NOT GET INTO IT THIS MORNING.

(After Scripture)

WHEN WE THINK OF JESUS, A NUMBER OF PICTURES MIGHT COME TO MIND.

WE MIGHT THINK OF HIM BLESSING LITTLE CHILDREN OR WASHING THE FEET OF THE DISCIPLES OR HEALING THE SICK.

WE MIGHT REMEMBER HIM WALKING ON WATER, STILLING THE STORM, OR BEING LED OFF TO A CRUEL DEATH WITHOUT A WORD.

AS WE THINK OF THESE STORIES & THESE IMAGES OF JESUS, WE WONDER HOW IN THE WORLD PEOPLE TURNED ON HIM & WANTED TO KILL HIM.
AND THEN WE SEE A STORY LIKE THIS & WE BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND.

WHAT WE DON’T UNDERSTAND IS – WHY’D HE DO IT?

WHY DID JESUS GO INTO SUCH A SPONTANEOUS FIT OF RAGE THAT DAY?

WELL, FIRST OF ALL, I DON’T THINK THIS WAS A “SPONTANEOUS FIT OF RAGE.”

I THINK IT WAS WELL PLANNED-OUT & COMPLETELY THOUGHT-THROUGH.

THIS WAS CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED & CHOREOGRAPHED.

EVERYTHING, AS IT WAS ALREADY LATE, HE WENT OUT TO BETHANY WITH THE TWELVE.”

YOU SEE, I THINK THIS IS A HINT FROM MARK THAT JESUS SAW EVERYTHING THAT WAS TAKING PLACE & THEN CAME UP WITH HIS PLAN FOR THE NEXT DAY.

THIS WAS NO SPONTANEOUS FIT OF RAGE – IT WAS A WELL-THOUGHT BIT OF DRAMATIC ACTING. JESUS WAS ACTING HERE AS A PROPHET. PROPHETS HAD A PASSION FOR GOD AND GOD'S WAYS.

THEY USED BOTH WORDS AND ACTIONS TO GET THEIR MESSAGE OUT.

SOMETIMES THEY DID SOME STREET THEATER.
ISAIAH WALKED NAKED AND BAREFOOT FOR THREE YEARS TO ACT OUT THE COMING CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL TO THE BABYLONIANS.

JEREMIAH SMASHED A BIG CLAY JAR IN FRONT OF THE ELDERS TO ACT OUT THE COMING DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL.

WHEN JESUS CLEANSES THE TEMPLE, HE’S TAKING ON THE ROLE OF A PROPHET.

THIS IS STREET THEATER WITH A PURPOSE.

HERE’S THE POINT OF THIS DRAMA THAT JESUS PLAYS OUT.

BEING A JEW IN JESUS' DAY WAS EXPENSIVE.

WORSHIPERS AT THE TEMPLE NEEDED TO BRING A SACRIFICE, AND THE SACRIFICE NEEDED TO BE WITHOUT BLEMISH.
IF YOUR ANIMAL HAD ANY DEFECT AT ALL, IT WASN’T ACCEPTABLE.

WHEN INSTRUCTIONS HAD BEEN GIVEN IN SCRIPTURE ABOUT SACRIFICES, MERCY WAS SHOWN TO THE POOR.

THOSE OF MEANS WERE REQUIRED TO BRING A SHEEP OR A GOAT OR AN OX - A SUBSTANTIAL SACRIFICE.

BUT THE POOR WERE ALLOWED TO BRING MUCH LESS - JUST A PAIR OF DOVES - AND STILL BE ACCEPTABLE.

THE GOSPEL ACCOUNTS OF THE TROUBLE IN THE TEMPLE MAKE A POINT OF MENTIONING THAT JESUS WENT AFTER THE SELLERS OF DOVES. WHY?
BECAUSE THAT’S WHAT WAS REQUIRED OF THE POOR & EVEN THAT WOULD HAVE CREATED A TREMENDOUS BURDEN FOR THEM.

THAT’S WHAT ANGERED JESUS.


JESUS WAS ACTING HERE ON BEHALF OF THE POOR.

BUT THAT’S NOT ALL THAT TROUBLED JESUS THAT DAY – OR, TO BE MORE PRECISE, WHAT TROUBLED HIM THE DAY BEFORE – WHAT MOVED HIM TO CONCOCT THIS “STREET THEATER” DRAMA.
THE TEMPLE AREA COVERED THE TOP OF MOUNT ZION – ABOUT 30 ACRES.

THAT'S A PRETTY MASSIVE SPACE.

IT WAS SURROUNDED BY GREAT WALLS - OVER A THOUSAND FEET ON EACH SIDE.

THE WIDEST OUTER SPACE WAS CALLED “THE COURT OF THE GENTILES.”

ANYONE COULD GO THERE – JEWISH OR NOT.

AS YOU WALKED THROUGH THAT OUTER COURT, YOU CAME TO ANOTHER WALL.

THERE WERE SIGNS ON THIS WALL.

THE SIGNS CLEARLY WARNED GENTILES – NON-JEWS – TO VENTURE NO FURTHER: “WHOSOEVER PASSES WILL HAVE ONLY HIMSELF TO BLAME FOR HIS ENSUING DEATH.”
THE NEXT WALL SEPARATED WHAT WAS CALLED “THE COURT OF THE WOMEN.”

JEWISH WOMEN COULD COME THERE FOR PRAYER AND SACRIFICE.

BUT THEY HAD TO STOP AT THE NEXT WALL, WHICH LED TO “THE COURT OF THE ISRAELITES.”

ONLY JEWISH MEN COULD GO IN THERE.

THE INMOST COURT WAS “THE COURT OF THE PRIESTS,” AND ONLY THE PRIESTS COULD GO PAST THAT WALL.

THE INNERMOST WALL SEPARATED “THE HOLY OF HOLIES,” AND ONLY THE HIGH PRIEST WENT IN THERE, AND THEN ONLY ONCE A YEAR.

YOU CAN SEE WHAT IS BEING PICTURED HERE: EXCLUSION, EXCLUSION, EXCLUSION.
THAT, TOO, IS WHY JESUS WAS ANGRY & ENGAGED IN THIS STREET THEATER ACT OF PUBLIC DEFIANCE.

IT’S WHY HE CALLS OUT TO EVERYONE THERE - “IS IT NOT WRITTEN: 'MY HOUSE WILL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS?' BUT YOU HAVE MADE IT A DEN OF ROBBERS!”

JESUS ALWAYS REMINDED PEOPLE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS FOR EVERYBODY.

REMEMBER ANOTHER TIME HE GOT ANGRY?

THE DISCIPLES TRIED TO KEEP SOME PARENTS WITH THEIR LITTLE KIDS AWAY FROM JESUS.

HE BECAME ANGRY AND SAID, “THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE!”

THE KINGDOM OF GOD - THE FAMILY OF JESUS - IS FOR EVERYBODY.
JESUS KNOCKED DOWN THE WALLS.

THAT'S WHAT HE WAS DOING IN THE TEMPLE WITH HIS LITTLE BIT OF STREET THEATER.

IN CLEARING THE TEMPLE, JESUS IS MAKING A STATEMENT ABOUT THE TWO THINGS CLOSEST TO THE HEART OF GOD – CARE FOR THE POOR & THE DOWNTRODDEN & A DESIRE TO BE IN LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL PEOPLE.

AS WE CAN SEE FROM THE RESPONSE OF JESUS, THESE ARE THINGS THAT MATTER TO GOD.

GOD CARES IMMENSELY ABOUT THE POOR, THE NEEDY & THE MARGINALIZED & GOD WANTS TO HAVE A LOVING RELATIONSHIP WITH ALL PEOPLE.

SO - WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH US TODAY?

EVERYTHING.
IN CLEARING THE TEMPLE, JESUS IS MAKING A CRITICAL STATEMENT ABOUT THE PURPOSE OF THE HOUSE OF GOD.

HE’S MAKING A STATEMENT ABOUT OUR PERSONAL CALL AS ONE OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

THIS ACTION OF JESUS INVITES US TO ASK OURSELVES IF OUR CHURCH TRULY HAS ROOM FOR ALL PEOPLE OR DO WE HAVE SUBTLE WAYS OF CROWDING OUT SOME OF GOD'S CHILDREN?

IS THERE REALLY ROOM HERE FOR EVERYONE?

IS THERE ROOM IN YOUR PEW FOR THE MAN WHO HASN’T BATHED OR THE PARENT WITH ACTIVE CHILDREN?

IS THERE ROOM FOR THOSE OF DIFFERENT RACIAL, EDUCATIONAL, SOCIOECONOMIC & ETHNIC BACKGROUNDS?
"MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS."

THAT DESIRE OF GOD HASN’T CHANGED.

THIS HAS TO BE A PLACE WHERE ANYONE & EVERYONE CAN COME AND MEET GOD.

IF WE HAVE DOORS THAT KEEP SOME FROM ENTERING, THEN WE’RE NOT ALLOWING THIS PLACE & THIS SPACE TO TRULY BE GOD’S HOUSE.

IN THIS PASSAGE, JESUS IS OVERTURNING MORE THAN TABLES IN THE TEMPLE.

HE’S OVERTURNING ALL OF OUR CHERISHED WAYS OF DOING THINGS.

HE’S OVERTURNING THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE.

HE’S OVERTURNING WE WAY WE OPERATE.

HE’S OVERTURNING OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD.
WE TALKED ABOUT IT JUST A FEW WEEKS AGO WHEN WE CONSIDERED THE IDEA OF “AN UPSIDE DOWN WORLD.”

THAT’S WHAT JESUS IS DOING WITH THIS STREET THEATER DRAMA.

IN DOING SO, HE’S LOOKING FOR PEOPLE WHO WILL BE SO MOVED BY IT, PEOPLE WHO WILL SO CHALLENGED, PEOPLE WHO WILL BE SO INSPIRED, THAT THEY’LL JOIN HIS EFFORT TO TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN.

I THINK THAT’S WHAT WAS SO FRIGHTENING TO THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS & POLITICAL AUTHORITIES.

WE’VE TALKED A LOT ABOUT THE CONSTANT & COMFORTING RE-ASSURING WORDS OF JESUS – “DO NOT BE AFRAID.”

WELL, HERE WE FIND PRECISELY THE OPPOSITE.
AFTER THIS STREET THEATER DRAMA, WE READ “THE CHIEF PRIEST & THE Scribes...WERE AFRAID OF HIM, BECAUSE THE WHOLE CROWD WAS SPELLBOUND BY HIS TEACHING.”

DEPENDING ON HOW YOU VIEW THIS EVENT, YOU’RE LEFT EITHER AFRAID OR SPELLBOUND.

THE AUTHORITIES WERE AFRAID OF HIM & THE WORLD WAS “SPELLBOUND.”

OTHER TRANSLATIONS USE – INSTEAD OF “SPELLBOUND” – WORDS LIKE “AMAZED” OR “ASTONISHED.”

THAT’S WHAT JESUS ASKS OF US AS HIS FOLLOWERS.

HE ASKS US TO ACT IN WAYS THAT LEAVE THE WORLD SPELLBOUND BY OUR LOVE, AMAZED BY OUR COURAGE, ASTONISHED BY OUR RADICAL, INCLUSIVE...
GENEROSITY & KINDNESS THAT WILL HELP HIM

“TURN THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN” LIKE HE DID THOSE TABLES IN THE TEMPLE.

WHY DON’T WE ALL JOIN THE “STREET THEATER DRAMA TROUPE OF JESUS?” AMEN.

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