

**John 2:13-22
March 4, '18
Lent 3**

“ONE LETTER AWAY FROM...”

SERMON TITLES ARE AN ALBATROSS.

I SAID THAT TO SOMEONE THIS PAST WEEK – SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T PREACH EVERY WEEK, BUT HAS DONE SO ON A FAIRLY REGULAR BASIS.

HE WAS TELLING ME THAT THE MOST DIFFICULT PART OF PREACHING FOR HIM IS COMING UP WITH A TITLE FOR THE SERMON.

THAT'S WHAT LED ME TO TELL HIM THAT “*SERMON TITLES ARE AN ALBATROSS.*”

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE TITLE SHOULD, IDEALLY, BE THE FINAL THING THAT IS DONE IN PREPARING A SERMON.

ONE SHOULD COMPLETE THE SERMON AND THEN, BASED ON THE DIRECTION IT TAKES, DETERMINE AN APPROPRIATE TITLE.

UNFORTUNATELY, CIRCUMSTANCES FORCE THE EXACT OPPOSITE TO TAKE PLACE.

FOR ME, THERE'S A NEWSLETTER ARTICLE & THE SIGN OUTSIDE & EVEN THE BULLETIN TO CONSIDER.

THIS MAY SHOCK SOME OF YOU, BUT A SERMON ISN'T USUALLY COMPLETED BEFORE THE NEED FOR THE TITLE IN THE NEWSLETTER, THE SIGN OUTSIDE OR EVEN THE BULLETIN ON THURSDAY MORNING.

THEREFORE, THE SERMON IS GIVEN A TITLE LONG BEFORE IT'S BEEN COMPLETED.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT IT CREATES A TEMPTATION TO LET THE SERMON TITLE AFFECT THE APPROACH TO A PARTICULAR PASSAGE MORE THAN THE PASSAGE ITSELF!

ONE SOLUTION, OF COURSE, WOULD BE TO LEAVE THE SERMON TITLELESS OR, TO DIFFERENTIATE IT FROM OTHERS, CALL IT “A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 2:13-22.”

I TELL YOU ALL THAT TO TELL YOU THAT THIS SERMON’S TITLE WAS DETERMINED WITH THAT THOUGHT IN MIND & IT IS LITTLE MORE THAN SOMETHING I FOUND INTERESTING IN RELATIONSHIP TO WHAT WE USUALLY THINK OF WHEN WE HEAR THIS STORY.

WE ORDINARILY ASSOCIATE THIS EVENT WITH AN EMOTION EXPRESSED BY JESUS & THAT EMOTION IS “ANGER.”

THERE’S A LOT WE CAN DO WITH THAT BUT WE WON’T FOCUS ON IT THIS MORNING, OTHER THAN TO SAY A COUPLE THINGS ABOUT IT & HOW IT LED TO A SERMON TITLE.

LAST YEAR – ON THIS VERY SUNDAY – MARCH 5, 2017 - WE READ MARK’S ACCOUNT OF THIS EVENT & I SUGGESTED THAT WE MIGHT WANT TO LOOK AT THIS EVENT AS A VERY CHOREOGRAPHED BIT OF STREET THEATER PERFORMED BY JESUS.

PERHAPS SO.

AND YET, WE STILL LOOK AT IT AS AN EXPRESSION OF ANGER IN SOME FORM.

WHEN WE DO, IT RUNS COUNTER TO WHAT WE TRADITIONALLY THINK OF WHEN WE THINK OF JESUS AND WHAT STRUCK ME ABOUT THAT WORD “ANGER” AND OUR COMMON UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS IS THAT IT’S JUST ONE LETTER AWAY FROM ANOTHER WORD THAT SEEMS ALMOST CONTRADICTORY.

THAT WORD IS “MANGER.”

WE THINK OF MEEK & MILD BABY JESUS LYING IN A MANGER.

HOWEVER, WHEN WE PLACE THIS EVENT IN ITS USUAL CHRONOLOGICAL SETTING, IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THIS MAY HAVE

BEEN THE FINAL STRAW FOR THOSE WHO SOUGHT TO EXECUTE JESUS & HIS ANGER LEADS TO “DANGER” – AGAIN, JUST ONE LETTER AWAY.

SO THAT’S HOW I HAD SOME FUN THIS WEEK IN COMING UP WITH A TITLE FOR THIS SERMON.

ENOUGH WITH THE TITLE, THOUGH.

THIS IS A VERY FAMILIAR EVENT TO NEARLY EVERYONE – THE EVENT WE KNOW AS “THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE.”

IT’S FOUND IN ALL FOUR GOSPELS.

THERE’S SOMETHING VERY ODD & VERY INTERESTING ABOUT JOHN’S VERSION OF THIS STORY, THOUGH.

ORDINARILY, WHEN WE THINK OF THIS STORY, WE THINK OF IT TAKING PLACE DURING HOLY WEEK.

IN FACT, WHEN WE DO A CHRONOLOGY OF EVERYTHING THAT TAKES PLACE DURING HOLY WEEK, THIS EVENT PLAYS A PROMINENT ROLE.

WE THINK OF JESUS ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM ON PALM SUNDAY & THEN ENTERING THE TEMPLE ON MONDAY & PERFORMING THIS STUNNING ACT.

THAT’S WHERE WE FIND IT IN MATTHEW, MARK & LUKE.

AFTER THEY HAVE TOLD US EVERYTHING ELSE ABOUT THE MINISTRY OF JESUS, THEY TELL US ABOUT HIS ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM JUST 5 DAYS BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION & THEN THEY TELL US ABOUT THIS EVENT IN THE TEMPLE.

BUT IN JOHN, THE ONLY ACT THAT JESUS HAS PERFORMED PRIOR TO THIS ONE IS CHANGING WATER INTO WINE AT A WEDDING.

THAT OBVIOUSLY CAN LEAD TO SOME CONFUSION & OBVIOUS QUESTIONS.

WHO'S RIGHT?

IS IT JOHN?

DID THIS TAKE PLACE VERY EARLY IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS?

OR ARE THE OTHER THREE GOSPELS RIGHT IN PLACING IT

DURING HOLY WEEK?

BUT THEN, WE MIGHT ASK ANOTHER QUESTION TO PREVENT US FROM SUGGESTING THAT ONE (OR THREE!) OF THE GOSPELS IS WRONG.

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT IT HAPPENED ON TWO SEPARATE OCCASIONS?

WITH REGARD TO *THAT* QUESTION, I DON'T THINK IT'S FEASIBLE TO THINK OF THERE BEING TWO SEPARATE OCCURRENCES OF THIS SAME EVENT.

BUT AS FAR AS THE TIME IN WHICH IT HAPPENED, I DON'T THINK THERE HAS TO BE ANY CONCERN.

I THINK THE OTHER 3 EVANGELISTS ARE RIGHT – THIS HAPPENED DURING HOLY WEEK.

BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THAT JOHN IS WRONG.

I THINK JOHN INTENTIONALLY PLACES THIS EVENT OUT OF ORDER CHRONOLOGICALLY FOR A REASON.

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN IS ALL ABOUT SIGNS – THE WORKS OF JESUS THAT ARE A SIGNPOST TO GOD.

WHAT JESUS SEEMS TO BE SAYING THROUGHOUT JOHN'S GOSPEL IS, *"IF YOU WANT TO KNOW WHERE GOD IS, LOOK AT ME.*

LOOK AT WHAT I'M DOING, AND IN SEEING ME, YOU SEE GOD."

GO BACK TO JOHN'S ACCOUNT OF THIS EVENT.

THE QUESTION THAT WAS ASKED OF JESUS WAS, *"WHAT SIGN CAN YOU SHOW US FOR DOING THIS?"*

HIS RESPONSE WAS, “DESTROY THIS TEMPLE, AND IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP.”

THE PEOPLE, OF COURSE, THOUGHT HE WAS SPEAKING LITERALLY OF THE TEMPLE MADE OF BRICKS & MORTAR STANDING BEFORE THEM.

BUT THE LAST VERSE OFFERS A DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING.

“AFTER HE WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, HIS DISCIPLES REMEMBERED THAT HE HAD SAID THIS; AND THEY BELIEVED THE SCRIPTURE AND THE WORD THAT JESUS HAD SPOKEN.”

PICTURE IT – AFTER THE RESURRECTION, AFTER THE DISCIPLES REFLECTED ON EVERYTHING JESUS HAD DONE & EVERYTHING HE HAD SAID TO THEM, IT ALL FINALLY COMES TOGETHER.

“OH, YEAH! NOW I GET IT! REMEMBER WHEN HE WAS TALKING ABOUT RAISING UP THE TEMPLE IN THREE DAYS IF IT WAS DESTROYED? HE WASN'T TALKING ABOUT THE TEMPLE ITSELF. HE WAS TALKING ABOUT HIS RESURRECTION! HE WAS TALKING ABOUT HIMSELF!”

AND FROM THERE, THE DISCIPLES WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD IS NOT TO BE FOUND WITHIN THE CONFINES OF A MAN-MADE TEMPLE.

THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD WAS TO BE FOUND WHEREVER JESUS WAS PRESENT.

THAT'S WHY JOHN PLACES THIS EVENT SO EARLY IN THE MINISTRY OF JESUS.

IT'S AS IF HE'S SAYING, “EVERYTHING YOU'RE GOING TO READ FROM THIS POINT ON IN MY BOOK IS ABOUT THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD BEING IN THE PRESENCE OF JESUS HIMSELF.

IF YOU WANT TO FIND GOD, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE

IN A TEMPLE.

GOD IS WHEREVER JESUS IS.”

**THAT’S ALL WELL & GOOD FOR THE
CONTEMPORARIES OF JESUS – FOR THE DISCIPLES & FOR THOSE
WHO FOLLOWED HIM WHEN HE WAS HERE ON EARTH.**

**BUT IT SEEMS TO LEAVE OUT THE REST OF US – THOSE WHO ARE
LIVING 2,000 YEARS LATER.**

**WE CAN’T SEE JESUS – WE CAN’T LOOK AT THOSE SIGNS – WE
CAN’T FOLLOW HIM AROUND.**

**WE DON’T HAVE THE BENEFIT OF BEING ABLE TO SEE THE WAY
HE LIVES & THE THINGS HE DOES.**

BUT, YOU SEE, THAT’S THE PROMISE OF THE RESURRECTION.

THAT’S THE ASSURANCE OF THE ASCENSION.

NO LONGER IS JESUS CONFINED BY TIME & SPACE.

HE’S EVERYWHERE – IN ALL TIMES & IN ALL PLACES.

**I THINK THAT’S ONE OF THE IMPORTANT MESSAGES JESUS IS
PROCLAIMING WHEN HE EXPRESSES ANGER AT WHAT HE SEES
TAKING PLACE IN THE TEMPLE.**

YES, IT HAPPENED DURING HOLY WEEK.

**IT WAS LESS THAN A WEEK PRIOR THE RESURRECTION WHEN
HIS WORDS WOULD COME TRUE ABOUT “*RAISING THE TEMPLE IN
THREE DAYS.*”**

**BUT JOHN PLACES IT AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS GOSPEL TO
HELP US UNDERSTAND THAT THE PRESENCE OF GOD ISN’T CONFINED
TO A BUILDING.**

**IT’S A MESSAGE THAT IS AS IMPORTANT TO US TODAY AS IT WAS
THEN.**

GOD IS NOT CONFINED TO A CHURCH BUILDING.

YES, IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO BE HERE.

IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE TO WORSHIP, TO SING, TO PRAY, TO STUDY, TO SHARE IN HOLY COMMUNION & ENGAGE IN CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO BE HERE TO LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD PROCLAIMED IN A WAY THAT HELPS US SEE & EXPERIENCE GOD IN ALL OF LIFE.

WHAT THIS MEANS IS THAT THE "GRAVITATIONAL PULL" OF OUR LIFE TOGETHER SHOULD ULTIMATELY BE OUTWARD – FROM CHURCH TO THE WORLD – RATHER THAN THE OTHER WAY AROUND.

I THINK THIS HAS A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT OUR VOCATION & IT HAS A GREAT DEAL TO SAY ABOUT THE OTHER 167 HOURS OF OUR WEEK THAT ARE AWAY FROM WORSHIP.

I REMEMBER HOW TROUBLING I FOUND IT IN SEMINARY WHEN PEOPLE WOULD TALK ABOUT BEING CALLED INTO MINISTRY AS IF IT WAS SOMETHING HIGH & LOFTY – A CALLING THAT WAS SOMEHOW SUPERIOR & MORE SPIRITUAL THAN OTHER CALLINGS.

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME – I *DO* BELIEVE THAT A CALL TO MINISTRY IS HIGH & LOFTY & SPIRITUAL – BUT NO MORE THAN ANY OTHER CALLING IN LIFE.

BEFORE SEMINARY, I'D BEEN EMPLOYED AS A SECURITY GUARD, A WAREHOUSE WORKER, A TRUCK DRIVER AND A HOD CARRIER.

BEFORE SEMINARY, MY CAREER PLAN WAS TO BE A TEACHER OR A COUNSELOR OR AN ATHLETIC TRAINER.

TO ME, EVERY ONE OF THOSE CALLINGS FROM GOD WAS JUST AS HIGH & LOFTY & SPIRITUAL AS A CALL TO MINISTRY.

NO MATTER WHO WE ARE & NO MATTER WHAT WE DO – IN OUR CHOSEN VOCATION OR IN OUR FAMILY LIFE OR OUR NEIGHBORHOOD

OR OUR COMMUNITY OR OUR CLASSROOM – WE HAVE BEEN CALLED BY GOD TO SERVE & WE CAN SEE GOD’S PRESENCE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE.

AND WHAT’S MORE – WE CAN ENABLE OTHERS TO SEE GOD BY THE MANNER IN WHICH WE LIVE.

WE ARE CALLED TO BOTH *SEE* THE PRESENCE OF GOD & *BE* THE PRESENCE OF GOD.

THAT’S WHAT JESUS IS TALKING ABOUT HERE.

I THINK THAT’S PART OF WHAT BRINGS ABOUT HIS ANGER.

THERE WERE THOSE WHO WANTED TO CONFINE GOD TO THE TEMPLE.

THEY WANTED TO LIVE ONE WAY INSIDE THE WALLS OF A WORSHIP SPACE & ANOTHER WAY IN THE WORLD.

AS JOHN SHARES THIS EVENT AT THE OUTSET OF THE MINISTRY OF JESUS, HE’S TELLING US THAT IN EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS – IN EVERYTHING THAT JESUS SAYS & DOES – GOD IS PRESENT.

HE’S TELLING US THAT WE CAN HELP OTHERS UNDERSTAND THAT PRESENCE OF GOD BY SERVING AS CHRIST’S AMBASSADORS IN OUR DAILY LIFE.

TWO WEEKS AGO – ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – WE TALKED ABOUT THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS IN THE WILDERNESS & THE WAY IN WHICH HE WAS MINISTERED TO BY ANGELS.

ANGELS REPRESENTED THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN HIS LIFE & IN THE MIDST OF HIS TEMPTATIONS, TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS.

HERE AGAIN, I THINK THAT’S ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT MESSAGES JESUS IS ATTEMPTING TO CONVEY WITH THIS INCIDENT IN THE TEMPLE.

**THERE ARE ANGELS AROUND YOU WHEN YOU ARE AWAY FROM
THE TEMPLE – WHEN YOU ARE AWAY FROM THE HOUSE OF GOD.**

**JUST AS IMPORTANTLY – YOU ARE TO SERVE IN THAT CAPACITY
FOR OTHERS – BEING AN ANGEL – A REPRESENTATIVE OF GOD’S
PRESENCE IN THE WORLD.**

**BEING AN ANGEL – AN “ANGEL” - WOULDN’T YOU KNOW IT...IT’S
JUST ONE LETTER AWAY FROM.... AMEN.**

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