

Barre Congregational Church

March 7, 2021: A Pastoral Message by Pastor Margaret Keyser

~ Third Sunday of Lent~

“Destroy the Temple in Three Days, and I will Raise it!”

Our services can be found on our website at www.barrechurch.com and Facebook page.

Scripture Reading: John 2 v 13-22

I. Introduction:

It is so easy to listen to someone, and not understand what that person meant. It is easy to go away from the conversation, and have an impression about that person, based upon a misunderstanding, unclear communication, and unless that perception is corrected, we will build an image of that person based upon what we think we know from the conversation. We all find ourselves in situations like that, I can imagine. Our passage shows us how something like this can happen when Jesus arrives at the Temple in Jerusalem.

II. The Temple and Jesus' Messianic Claim

Jesus enters the Temple scene at the time of the Passover. The Temple was the center for Jewish life and worship, and the outer court was the place where the offering of sacrifices was made. When He arrived there, He saw lots of activities, trading, changing of currency from other places, and lots of animals, partly for the practice of sacrifice. It upset Him, that the place which should be a peaceful environment for worship, became a noisy place of money trading and sacrifice. You can imagine how surprising and perhaps upsetting His cleansing of the Temple must have been for the Jews. Who is this man, thinking He had the right to do what He did, running us out of our own Temple? “How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market?”, Jesus tells them. Jesus’ powerful reaction to what He saw, was not just a physical reaction, but a moral and spiritual reaction, says Leon Morris in his book, “The Gospel according to John”. How can this happen at the House of God?

Jesus’ claim that this was His Father’s house, brought out a reaction from the Jews, who, according to Morris, were alarmed by not so much that he cleansed the Temple, but that He in their minds, made a Messianic claim. How could He say it is His father’s house! Who is this

man? They demanded that He give them an authentic sign of His authority by which He acted. According to Paul in 1 Corinthians 1 v 22, the Jews were seekers after signs, and the Greeks were looking for wisdom. We see that play out right here.

III. Destroy the Temple, and I will raise it again in three days.

Jesus was known for not giving signs to those who challenged Him. We see that in Mark Chapter 8 v 11 when the Pharisees tested Him and asked Him a sign from heaven, “No sign will be given to this generation”, He said. In our text, instead of giving them a sign to prove that He is the Messiah, He tells them this, “Destroy the Temple, and I will raise it up again in three days. One can only imagine the added shock and confusion those who were gathered must have felt when He said that. Their reaction is as follows, “ It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days? What are you talking about? According to the first century historian, Titus Flavius Josephus the work on the temple was begun in the year 20 – 19 before Christ, and this incident at the temple would have taken place AD 27 or 28, which gives us the 46 years they were talking about. This building was a special and marvelous building, and there were still some renovations that were taking place. How can this man raise up a temple that was destroyed in three days, especially when it took that long to build?

Jesus, of course, says John, was talking about His Body as the Temple. The word that Jesus used for temple, meant sanctuary, a holy place where God was dwelling. God was dwelling in His Body. When they challenged Him to give them a sign, He gave them a sign, but not in the way they wanted to see it, says Morris. The reference to the temple was about His Body that would be led to the cross, to His death, and would be resurrected on the third day. Jesus’ words were prophetic and had a double meaning which was confusing for those at the temple. It went over their heads, so to speak. They could not understand His language.

So, what is Jesus doing here? Firstly, He is addressing the chaos at the Temple, the House of God, which is supposed to be a place of worship, where God is dwelling. Secondly, He is also trying to redirect the focus of the Jews from the physical temple to Himself, whose Body is the temple of God. It is not clear that He succeeded in doing that though. Thirdly, He shuts down the challenge they put to Him to perform a miracle to prove His authority, by speaking words they didn’t understand, but will hear about once He would rise from the dead. Finally, Jesus

emerges as the Son of God, at the House of God, with the hope that they will recognize Him as the One who was sent by God to bring salvation to all people.

IV. Conclusion

While the temple for the Jews was a special place and meaning, we too look at our church in a very special way. The church is the place where much activity happens. It is a place dear to us. The sanctuary, the fellowship hall, our offices, children's room all have a special place for us. We would not use the church for the kinds of things that would upset Christ, I would imagine.

I am wondering what Jesus would say to us during a time like this. How would His answer to the Jews be translated into our day with our own challenging questions, uncertainties, and desires about our church building? Would He tell us to destroy the church building and He will raise it up again in three days? I do not think so. Maybe He will use another metaphor, which we too would not understand. I do think though, that He would speak to us in a language that will refocus our attention on Him, especially during a time like Lent, where we must walk the journey of suffering with Him. I also think that He will give us a message of hope, because He Himself had been raised from the dead, so as we pray and sing and turn our hearts to Him, yielding our souls to the One who would die, but be resurrected again, we will see the light, the direction that God wants us to go.

I pray that Christ will speak to us in a language that does not have a double meaning, but that gives clarity during a time like this. Amen.