

March 4, 2018 – 3rd Sunday in Lent
Pastor Erin Bouman, Irving Park Lutheran Church
John 2:13-22; Exodus 20:1-17

WWJD

Thank you Bruce, for sharing about your time in China & Japan, and thank you Sara for speaking with our Sunday School students. I thought the artwork on the bulletin cover was somewhat fitting with this week's countries of focus; the style of this structure called to my mind architecture from the East. Interestingly enough, this picture comes from a collection of bulletin art coded to our weekly gospel readings. That is, this structure is from the east—but from the Middle East. This picture depicts the Temple in Jerusalem, which is where we find Jesus, in today's gospel reading from John.

It's no surprise that we find Jesus in the Temple. He's God; you'd expect to find him in a holy place. But what he does there may be a surprise. This is no gentle Jesus, meek and mild. This is a vigorous, dynamic, angry, aggressive Jesus. Not typically how people think of Jesus. The striking nature of this scene has been depicted in many a work of art, in many paintings throughout the centuries, there were many other options for the bulletin cover. I've seen a meme on the internet that shows one such depiction, a classical painting of this gospel scene, with these words superimposed: "If anyone ever asks you 'What Would Jesus Do?' Remind them that flipping tables and brandishing a whip are within the realm of possibilities."

What would Jesus do? Maybe a better question is "Why would Jesus do that?" Why would Jesus overturn tables in the Temple? That he does so is remarkable enough it prompts artists to paint it, and all four gospels record it. In the other three gospels, Jesus does not have a whip, but he does have harsh words. In the other three gospels Jesus castigates the money changers for unfair business practices, and in a holy place, for cheating people, for making the Lord's house a den of robbers.

In fact, the existence of money changers is allowed in the Deuteronomic law. There's a section in the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Torah, Jesus' Bible, that says that money changing is lawful, it's a way to help people make their offering, by helping them convert their livestock into cash. And it's also a way for observant Jews to use coins that do not depict the emperor's face, which would be a form of idolatry. It's within the law that there be money changers in the outer area of the Temple.

But laws, even ones intended to be helpful, can be twisted, perverted. We know this. Right now in our country we are talking about just this: about what the law allows, and if it is being perverted. I am talking now about the second amendment, about what it allows, and if it is being perverted. I am talking now about how we understand the right to bear arms, together with another law, "You shall not kill."

All the killing all this last year... all these last years. It makes weep. It makes me feel sick. It makes me angry. There are times when tables need to be overturned. There are times laws are being perverted. There are times when anger is the holy response.

Jesus goes to the Temple, sees what's happening, and does something. That's what God does. This is what God does in Jesus: sees what is going on, sees how far humanity has strayed from God's life-giving commandments, gets upset about it, and does something. This is what God does in Jesus, in the cross. That's what God does, for us.

Isn't it time we do something, too?