

SERMON FOR THE 2ND MID-WEEK LENTEN SERVICE, 2021
Our Lord Took Significant Action
Mark 11:15-19

Grace and peace to you all from our risen Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The text for our sermon today is Mark 11:15-19: ¹⁵ **When they had come to Jerusalem Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who were selling and buying in the Temple. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the chairs of those who were selling doves.** ¹⁶ **He would not allow anyone to carry any object through the Temple.** ¹⁷ **Then He began to teach them: “Has not Scripture said, ‘My House will be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? However, you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”**

¹⁸ **When the Chief Priests and scribes heard this, they began to look for a way to destroy Him. For they were afraid of Him, because the whole crowd was astonished at His teaching.** ¹⁹ **Whenever evening came, they used to go out of the city.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

We are all familiar with the details of the major events on Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. But what took place on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday of Holy Week? Those three days contain some of Jesus’ most significant actions, teaching, and confrontation with the religious leaders of His day.

The events in our text today take place on Monday of Holy Week. On the previous day, Palm Sunday, Jesus had been welcomed to Jerusalem with great enthusiasm and shouts of “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!*” (Matthew 21:9). He was openly acclaimed as the promised Messiah, with a divinely appointed destiny to fulfil. In his account of Palm Sunday, Mark writes how “*Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the Temple. He looked around at everything. Since it was already late, He went out to Bethany with the Twelve*” (Mark 11:11). This was in fulfilment of

the prophecy of Malachi who said, “*Look! I am sending My messenger, and he will make the way clear ahead of Me. Then the Lord, for whom you are looking, will suddenly come to His Temple, yes, the Messenger of the covenant, whom you desire. Look! He is coming*” (Malachi 3:1). The next day, Monday of Holy Week, Jesus would do a lot more than merely look around the temple grounds. He would be disgusted with what He would see and would take significant action.

Mark writes of that day, “**When they had come to Jerusalem Jesus went into the Temple and began to drive out those who were selling and buying in the Temple. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the chairs of those who were selling doves.**” Then, quoting Isaiah 56:7, Jesus states, “**My House will be called a house of prayer for all the nations.**”

Perhaps this is a bit shocking to us as this is not the way we are accustomed to seeing Jesus. It is definitely not the meek and mild Jesus we sing about at Christmas.

So just what was happening in our text?

Each Passover festival, celebrated annually by the Jews in remembrance of God delivering His people from their slavery in Egypt, crowds of Jews would come to Jerusalem to celebrate. Many would come from far away. It was much easier for them to buy the animals they needed to sacrifice as close to the Temple as possible, rather than bringing the animals with them over long distances. To make matters convenient, the priests just happened to have *pre-approved animals* for these travellers to purchase. Of course, these animals would come at a premium price. There were even reports of kickbacks to some of the priests. There were also reports of priests rejecting animals purchased at places other than the official temple vendors in order to force people to buy from certain salesmen.

Travellers to Jerusalem would also come with foreign currency, so, therefore, they would need to exchange it for the currency that was acceptable to pay the temple tax. As you may expect, there were reports of the moneychangers charging exorbitant exchange fees. The focus was no longer on God, prayer, and sacrifice but on the “business” of the Temple at Passover time. That had become the point of emphasis.

However, there was something still more terrible happening. Note how Jesus' quote of Isaiah states that the Temple was to be a **“house of prayer for all the nations.”** It was to be a house of prayer not just for Jews but for Gentiles as well. That is why the Temple was constructed with a court for male Jews, a court for female Jews, and a court for Gentiles. When some of the temple precincts were converted into marketplaces, where would the Gentiles, the “nations,” be able to pray and worship? The Temple that was meant to be a **“house of prayer for all the nations”** was instead a money-making machine for the religious leaders and all who were involved in their greed. This is why Jesus launched into significant action, clearing the temple grounds.

This day of significant action on the part of Jesus sends a message to you and to me. We, too, can be tempted to turn the practice of the Christian faith into a means to line our pockets, to make our budget for the year. It is so easy for us to give budgets and offerings, income and expenses such a high priority that we soon lose sight of the real reason we're doing what we're doing as a congregation. We gather together around Word and Sacrament to be served by Jesus, but if anyone new or, someone like the prodigal son, who has left but now returned, do we view such people with joy, as people like us, who need to be continually fed with God's gifts of Word and Sacrament, or do we at least in part welcome them with the thought in the back of our mind that these people *can further help us make our budget?*

Now I'm not saying that we shouldn't have a budget and that we shouldn't plan and make financial projections. Of course, we must - but we need to be on guard to keep our priorities straight. Budgets are there to serve ministry, not the other way around!

The moneychangers and those who were selling doves for the sacrifices placed a real obstacle in the way for people, especially Gentiles, to worship God. In fact, they all but precluded the Gentiles from being able to pray and worship in the temple courts. What obstacles do we place in front of ourselves in our lives of worship? Are there obstacles that are self-inflicted? Are there obstacles that are placed there by someone else, perhaps someone close to you? Or are we perhaps placing obstacles in the lives of others who seek to worship?

Jesus would like nothing more than to take significant action in overturning and driving those obstacles out of our lives so that we may receive from Him His good gifts of Word and Sacrament.

It was significant action indeed on the part of Jesus on the Monday of this most Holy Week. Yet, it would pale by comparison to the significant action He would take for us and for all people at the end of this week. He would not drive vendors and animals from the temple court. Instead, He would drive sin, death, and the devil from their place of rule and dominance in the lives of people. In so doing, He drove out that which separated us from God, namely, our sin.

All that Christ has accomplished for us became ours on a wonderful day of significant action in our lives, namely, on the day of our baptism. On this day, the Holy Spirit, working through water and the Word, called each one of us to faith, washed away all our sin, claimed us as His children, and made us heirs of everlasting life. The day of our baptism was truly a day of significant action on God's part.

As we may expect, the religious leaders of the day were not pleased with the action Jesus took on Monday of Holy Week. It definitely was not good for business. Mark even records that **“When the Chief Priests and scribes heard this, they began to look for a way to destroy Him.”** By the end of Holy Week, they would think that they had done exactly that. Little would they realise that through His death, He would pay for the sins of mankind – even for those who had turned the Temple into a place for business, and that His resurrection three days later would show that God the Father had accepted the full payment of His Son made on mankind's behalf.

May we continue to follow our Saviour to His cross this Lenten season, and see in Him the true sacrifice for all our sin, and, for as long as our Lord grants us the privilege to live on this earth, to take our faith and our church life seriously. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.