

Lent 3 B  
John 2:13-22  
March 3, 2024

*“Does it Spark Joy?”*  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my God’s house a market-place!’ His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ Then the religious leaders said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then they said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.*

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Jesus had a gift. He had a natural ability, a God-given aptitude, if you will, for getting under all the wrong peoples’ skins. He was a master and he made it look almost artful. Today, we hear of Jesus storming the temple with a whip of his own fashioning, at a time when it was bustling with merry pilgrims who had come from far and wide to celebrate the feast of the Passover. Like the Grinch who stole Christmas, Jesus swept into the temple in a huff, turned over the merchants’ tables, chased away the sacrificial animals, and poured out the money changers’ coins—

effectively stealing the festival and ending the celebration. It was a religious festival, for crying out loud, why be such a killjoy? Needless to say, his actions didn't go over well with the temple authorities—those formidable foes who would play a part in Jesus' eventual arrest and crucifixion. His explanation? Simply that God's house shouldn't be a marketplace. Just an aside, my parents used this story as a justification for their position that our Girl Scout cookies and band fruit should not be sold at church.

Was that really all there was to it? Zeal for God's house? Of course not! When was anything Jesus ever said or did exactly as it appears at a surface reading? No, the accounts of this story from Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that Jesus did this because of corruption—because those who were buying and selling and changing local monies into temple currency were cheating people.

Professor Marilyn Salmon reminds us that it wasn't just the merchants and money changers or even the temple authorities that stood to benefit from this corruption. It was also the Romans.

Roman officials appointed the chief priest and he served their interests. Roman coffers benefited from the marketplace that supported sacrificial rites. A disruption at the marketplace at one of the temple courts during a festival season like Passover affected Rome's revenues.<sup>1</sup>

Surely Jesus knew this—knew how deep the corruption ran. And so, fueled by his righteous anger at an unjust system that benefitted the temple elites and the Roman oppressors, Jesus went on a rampage that cleared out the animal merchants and the money changers, and, if for but a brief

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<sup>1</sup> Marilyn Salmon. "Commentary on John 21:13-22," Workingpreacher.com, May 11, 2012: <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/third-sunday-in-lent-2/commentary-on-john-213-22>.

time, threw a proverbial wrench in the wheel of exploitation that threatened to roll right over the common folk.

There are no doubt myriad correlations we could draw between this text and the exploitation of peoples and resources the world over. But today, I'm feeling like we need a more pastoral and less prophetic application of this story for ourselves. With all that's wrong with the world, sometimes it's easy to forget that for any of us to be effective agents of change, we've got to start by caring for ourselves. And so, I'd like us to consider the temple court as a metaphor for our lives. And I'd like for us to consider the merchants and the money changers, the cattle and the doves, and even the silly sheep as a metaphor for all the things that get in the way of us functioning as the person we want to be. And just for today, imagine Jesus as a Palestinian version of Marie Kondo motioning to all the merchants and money changers, cattle and doves and sheep and asking us, "Does it spark joy?" Does it spark joy?

During the season of Lent, we don't traditionally talk much about joy. In fact, millions of Christians give up things that they *enjoy* as part of their Lenten discipline. Instead, I'm going to suggest that the same Jesus that cleared out the temple court so that the temple could function as it was intended, as the dwelling of God and not the marketplace he saw before him, *that* Jesus might invite us to do the same. That Jesus might see the marketplace of competing allegiances, endless worry, ceaseless stress, and constant activity within each of us, fashion a whip and drive it all out so that we could function as we were intended. So that we could love ourselves and God and our neighbors, so that we could marvel at the grandeur of the cosmos, so that we could think deep thoughts, and live truly abundant lives.

Today, I want to invite you to take an honest look within. Notice all the stuff that's cluttering you up and weighing you down. Ask yourself, "Does this thing or that thing spark joy?" Does it play a part in helping you to function as you were intended? Does it contribute to you living an abundant life—your best life? I can almost guarantee the each and every one of us is either worrying about something, or preoccupied with

something, or actively doing something that doesn't spark joy. Take a moment and take a look within and then consider giving that thing up for Lent. Let it go. Or, as my mom would say, "give it to God." I'm not naïve; I know how difficult it is to truly let something like that go. It'll probably take discipline, practice, and lots of little reminders, but it is possible. If you need extra motivation, imagine Jesus standing over you with his homemade whip saying, "Take that thing out of here! It's getting in the way of you functioning as you were intended!"

This Lent, instead of giving up something you enjoy, try giving up something that's getting in the way of you being your best self and living your best life, as God intended. May it be so. Amen.