

March 4, 2018 3rd Sunday in Lent

Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope 1

Exodus 20:1-17, Psalm 19

Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/activist-protest-super-bowl-2018-minneapolis>.

Marilyn Salmon in Working Preacher about John 2:13-22 in 2012. Davidlose.net for Lent 3B, 2015.

Ideas and conversation with Rev. Jane McBride, First Congregational Church UCC, Minneapolis.

With the psalmist, let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable to you, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Grace and peace, beloved, of Jesus Christ.

Do you remember Superbowl afternoon, just a month ago today?

It was frigid, bright and sunny.

Some had stayed home to avoid the traffic,

some were working the game, others were preparing for game viewing,

and still plenty ventured out to church, to worship, as an **act of resistance** of sorts.

That afternoon, I went home to be with our daughters and a playmate who were busy in the kitchen concocting what is called slime.

As these girls mixed and kneaded, I checked the news about the protests surrounding the Superbowl.

It turned out I could live-stream video of a protest from the Green Line station in Cedar Riverside.

A few people had locked themselves together, and then locked themselves to the track:

trains were stopped,

buses had easily re-routed those heading to the game,

and for a time—in the bitterly cold air—these protesters joyfully sang and danced,

they chanted and made speeches,

they remembered their roots, their ancestors in bondage and in freedom, and they called for change.

How could we pour millions into the marketing, the events, the game, they wondered, and never seem to

have enough to actually shift how brown and black bodies are treated, heard, respected?

What would it take to disrupt business as usual and shift the power, the conversation?

Shut it down, they chanted, shut **it** down.

In this case the “it” was literally the Green Line, but more truly the “it” is a way of thinking that says that

for our society to function, some will be shut out, some will live in fear.

“It’s not about being anti-football,” Veronica Mendez Moore from CTUL told *The Nation*.

“It’s about being against a corporate party that’s extracting from our communities and creating an

environment of militarization, while increasing wealth at the top at the expense of those at the bottom.”

Shut it down, they chanted, shut it down.

Today's Gospel from John, with Jesus turning over the tables in the temple, actually shows up not only in John, but also in Matthew, Mark, and Luke—in each of the Gospels—it's that important. What's interesting, is that in Matthew, Mark, and Luke it's nestled neatly after what we call Palm Sunday when the branches are strewn on the road, when Hosannas ring out, when the cross looms near. I imagine that when word spread about Jesus at the temple, they shook their heads, musing: "He was just so angry, he turned over the tables: that was the last straw on the way to the cross." That's the popular read, and it fits in Matthew and Mark and Luke. But in John, in the rendition we heard this morning, it's far from Holy Week. It's only the beginning, the start, of John's gospel, just chapter two.

Jesus has changed the water into wine, blessing that wedding feast in Cana with this radical pouring out, this joy, this abundance, And then in the very next verses, with radical abundance surely still on his mind, John describes how the Passover is coming near. Pilgrims, millions of them, have made their way to Jerusalem—think security, think crowd control. The temple leadership under the thumb of Rome, and the civil leadership in coordination with the Roman officials and all the rest, they prepare for these visitors and their needs. Sacrifices must be made, so the vendors are ready with doves for the poorest, cattle for the wealthiest. It looks so simple, so hospitable: the temple authorities, the civil authorities, they are kindly making sure that folks can easily change their currency and buy these sacrificial animals at exorbitant mark up... ..all so they can keep their covenants with God, practice their religion, fill the temple coffers... ..how generous, right?! In truth, it's part of a carefully orchestrated oppressive economic cycle. Jesus at the temple that day shuts it down.

No, Jesus growls.

No: we need a new way of relating to God, even more, we need a new way of relating to one another. Shut it down, disrupt the economic system, disrupt the temple system, disrupt the business as usual system, so that this truly liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ—who knows death and who rises to life—... So **this** liberating Passover Gospel can go deep, seeping into every cell and actually living in us. Jesus in the temple, but really Jesus on the cross, shuts down these systems, these cycles, not, I believe, because he's so out of control angry, but rather because he's so clear, so organized, so connected to God's will and to his own calling.

Over the centuries, these passages, especially in John, have been read against the Jewish community. Trouble is, this Anti-Semitic read is destructive, devastating then, and devastating to our kin still today. I don't believe Jesus was anti-Jewish; Jesus was a Jew.

Rather, what disturbed Jesus, what pushed him to action, was the way the Roman Empire had co-opted the temple with a heavy thumb on the priests, on the liturgy, on the very soul of the people. Jesus' message of liberation, abundant life, hits against an economy rooted in fear, in greed, in violence. Shut it down, he cries, shut it down.

I tuned in to the watch that Superbowl protest from the comfort of my kitchen because my spouse, Jane, was there, and honestly, I was a little worried.

She and a few other clergy had been asked to stand witness around the protestors, to be moral observers, quietly praying, defusing any violence that might flare.

Now I know this whole scene makes some nervous, other uncomfortable, and some even angry. I get this.

That tension, that discomfort at rocking the boat is a good indicator of how deeply I'm in the boat.

The protests at the Superbowl, Jesus' table-turning at the temple: sometimes we must do things that need to be done, even when they make us nervous.

Jane had been to a meeting the evening before in preparation.

As she questioned herself, why was she there, it was abundantly clear that the organizers knew precisely what they sought to do, and why, and how, and it was clearly meant to be an optic.

Jane and some of our colleagues agreed to go—wearing their winter coats and boots with bright stoles resting on top—an act of following, not being the planners, not knowing all the details, but responding to an honest, human request for their presence, **for the visual reminder of God in that space.**

Shut it down, the protesters chanted, shut it down.

Jesus doesn't simply shut it down, Jesus goes another step to offer merciful promise.

At the end of this Gospel, Jesus reminds them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Jesus very body will be raised, and this Body of Christ, the community of the faithful—you and me—we will be freed for all time to live as Jesus beloved community wherever and however we are.

What a promise that we don't hear enough: We—our bodies—are Christ's body, loving, holding, stretching, forgiving, growing, changing, protesting, praying, we are Christ's body.

Soft and round bodies, firm and chiseled bodies.

Depressed and hopeful bodies. Bodies living with addiction.

Bodies that resist neat categories, queer and trans bodies.

Black and brown and peachy bodies. Bodies beaten and bruised. Bodies created for loving.

Bodies yearning, hungry, crying for a spark of holy mystery.

Bodies rooted deeply, rising and reaching, shining.

Bodies with tumors and lumps and bumps that frighten us.

Bodies that are more fragile than we'd wish, bodies that are changing.

Bodies and souls that have blessed us with strength and courage in the hardest times.

Bodies that are new and nimble, bodies that ache and groan, bodies that will soon taste death.

Bodies eager and ready, bodies worn down and tired.

Bodies with hearts and minds, limbs and lungs, holding the complexity around us, dwelling with the joyful
out pouring of our God.

**We, dear ones, are Christ's body—what beautifully good news,
if only we can believe it, can live it.**

Let us pray: Make us clear, O Holy God, of your call for our lives and our bodies. May resistance be
our holy practice. May abundance shape our actions. And may we experience again, by your death
and resurrection, what it means to be the body of Christ, broken and blessed, joyful and free. Amen.