

**Bodies, buildings, and boundaries: where God meets us**

My family is not huge on traditions, but we do have one that we take very seriously, and that is watching the 1973 musical-turned-movie Jesus Christ Superstar every year around Easter time. One of our favorite parts is the clearing of the Temple, because we never miss an opportunity to rock-scream Ted Neeley style at each other “Get out!!!”

Well. Today’s Gospel passage finds us there, deep in the Lenten-season, with blood running hot among the Jesus movement, nearing Passover, in the Temple with Jesus turning tables. It’s familiar to many of us. And as I read it, I want to hear Ted Neeley screaming “get out”, it feels righteous and exciting - but upon a closer reading, I realize that’s not really the mood here. Don’t get me wrong, the Jesus Christ Superstar telling of it tracks much more closely with the other three gospels - Mark, Matthew, and Luke all include this story as well, but it falls later in their timelines, and their telling includes a famous line, a callback to the prophet Jeremiah: “My house will be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers” But the gospel of John tells it differently: “Stop turning my Father’s house into a marketplace” and then deviates from the synoptics even more to say: “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in 3 days” It’s a different account.

The 3 other gospels teach us that the problem here was corruption, that people were cheating other people, or weaponizing the system for profit, not just selling animals as was the traditional Jewish practice where you would make offerings on behalf of your sin. But in John’s gospel, Jesus is not just acting against corruption - he uses temple language, familiar imagery, to communicate something about his own significance. We find this a lot in John, with people questioning Jesus and him responding in a way that doesn’t quite address what they asked. Earlier in John 2, “We have no more wine → Woman my hour has not yet come” Well that’s not what she asked, really... They talk past each other, there’s dissonance, and while it’s weird maybe to us, but I think today if we can embrace the strangeness, it can reveal God at work. Here people ask, “What sign can you show us that you have authority to act this way?” (because John is all about signs) and Jesus responds, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days” The temple was a unique place where atonement was made (at-one-ment, bringing together something which had been separated) - it was the meeting place, between the mortal, and the divine. And while we don’t have temples like that anymore, we are still very

much in the business of wondering: Where do our lives intersect with the divine? Where does God meet us?

Well, the good news of this 3rd week of Lent has everything to do with where God meets us. The first piece of it is that there is no place that we must go to be with God. Our relationship is not dependent upon the four walls of a building, a notion that holds such deep significance for us right now, even as much as we might want to be in a church building these days, as strained as our faith might seem without access to those traditional places we literally cannot go right now that had previously upheld our systems. But Jesus says, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it up again in three days” In other words, the place of divine presence, where we go to meet God, is no longer a building but the body of Jesus. Jesus becomes the gathering point to which we orient ourselves as followers of Christ, not a building. That is what forms and anchors a community. And this changes everything, because if people are to really and truly stop making the temple into a marketplace, then it cannot survive as it is. It does not function. It’s a hard pill to swallow even, because this is a radical shift, a total dismantling of a traditional, transactional system. However, coming to understand Jesus as the intersection, the place where divinity and humanity meet... this is still an act that brings about reconciliation and at-one-ment that people seek at the Temple, but this time it’s an act initiated by God, God’s sacrificial love. It’s about God’s act of seeking renewed relationship with an estranged creation. And it transcends all boundaries. There is no place that we must go to be with God, because God seeks us out.

And thus the second piece of Gospel news for today: that bodies, all bodies, are beloved. Because God became a body in all of its nooks and crannies and oddities and beauties. Jesus in his disruptive metaphorical self tells us that the transcendent is present in his body - distinct and different from our own, but a body nonetheless. And throughout this Lenten season it’s made clear to us just how embodied Jesus’ experience was - hands turning tables, eating and drinking, washing feet, beaten and killed, laid in a tomb, and in the stories of his resurrection, he is still a body — touchable, scarred, and eating. In all these events, the body of Jesus is the location of God, and the point of connection. Bodies are where our lives intersect with the divine. Anywhere. Anytime. Any body. Any place. Even when those bodies wear the same sweatpants for yet another day of this eternal year, or feel alone, or are sick or grieving or making mistakes or partaking in a communion that consists of a stale tortilla and very old rose from the back of the fridge at their kitchen table. We as Jesus followers know acutely the trials of being a body in this world, and we have no adequate description of the miracle it will be for God, after we are dead, to raise us up, in true wholeness. But, we will not let go of that hope, because

God was committed enough to human bodies to *become* one as love embodied in Jesus Christ, and committed enough to human bodies to raise Jesus up after his death. And until that day, may we orient ourselves as a community towards something so much bigger than one building, connected by the expansive relationships that we were made for, and inspired by the disruptive, radical call of Jesus to be a little bit strange in the time we do have on this earth in our beloved bodies.