

Sermon for Sunday, January 18, 2026

John 2:13-25

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

As you heard in the children's sermon there's a lot of emotion being experienced by people in our state. And it doesn't matter what your beliefs are about our current political situation: you have emotions and those feelings are yours and valid. Out of respect for one another and because we are a community of faith that cares for one another, we are called to recognize and respect each other's feelings even if our own are different.

Emotions; they are a powerful force. There are several emotions on display in today's Scripture reading.

Let's begin by considering the emotions of the vendors selling items in the Temple. The overturning of the tables, the scattering of the coins, and the freeing of the sacrificial animals destroyed their businesses. They were probably angry. It might be compared to COVID time when many businesses were forced to shut down out of fear for spreading disease. Yes, they would be able to rebuild and recover, but it would take time. And some never did recover. This recent experience allows us to recognize the emotions of fear and anger that the vendors in the Temple were feeling as they watched Jesus destroy their business.

Now we will turn to the emotions of the religious authorities which are more complicated. They thought they were doing the right thing by allowing the buying and selling of animals to occur in the outer precincts of the Temple. For you see, it was understood that all Jews were to go to the Temple three times a year and present an animal for sacrifice as a part of their worship. This practice had been going on for hundreds of years. Commerce in the Temple facilitated worship by pilgrims.

The Bible clearly says that this animal had to be "without blemish." By the time this story was written, Jews lived in far away countries like North Africa and Italy and Mesopotamia. It was very difficult, if not impossible, to safely transport an animal that you had raised to Jerusalem. As a result you had little choice but to buy one so that you could achieve the goal of proper worship. In addition, then as now, when you live in a different country you use their money. You come to Jerusalem and you

have to exchange your home currency with the currency of Jerusalem. Then as now, money changers need a profit as a part of their business model. You gotta make a living!

When Jesus cleanses the temple, drives out the animals and upsets the tables, he is not just destroying businesses. He is destroying the ability for people to worship in a manner that was considered right and proper. The religious authorities were deeply concerned with correct worship of God in part because they knew their history. When the Israelites messed up true worship, God allowed their country to be overrun with invading armies. The religious leaders feared the worst: the Romans were already there. Destroying the people's ability to worship as Jesus did might make God angry enough to allow the Romans to go one step further and destroy the country and the Temple. It is no wonder then, that the actions of Jesus placed them on high alert. Fear and anger will cause people to react; will cause people to take actions that later they recognize as huge mistakes causing irreparable harm. (Pause)

And then there is Jesus. What shall I say about him, about his display of emotion, and about his actions? There is no easy or simple way to explain what he did.

John the gospel writer places this story at the beginning of his gospel while the other three gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) place it during Holy Week. Those gospels make a case that Jesus' action of cleansing the Temple was the straw that broke the camel's back; that this action forced the religious authorities to take action against him. John the gospel writer places it early in Jesus' ministry career to make two points.

The first point is that the cleansing of the Temple causes the religious authorities to recognize Jesus as a potential threat. He's not some shaggy guy out in the wilderness teaching weird ideas. He's not some guy they can ignore; not when he comes into Jerusalem and takes radical actions. No, Jesus is someone they have to pay attention to.

The second point is to emphasize the idea that Jesus represents the inbreaking of God and God's kingdom here on earth. Not just in nice comfortable ways like graciously changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana. An amazing event but not necessarily the type of event that upsets the religious practices of the day.

No, the inbreaking of God and God's kingdom was destined to make radical changes to religious practices and not just Jewish ones. Eventually the entire Roman and Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses would fall by the wayside as would all of the gods and goddesses of other countries in Europe. As the hymn (Canticle of the Turning ELW 723) goes, "the world is about to turn." Whether the Jewish religious authorities could put that into words, they knew enough to be afraid.

There is a fundamental outline to every good story. First, we meet the characters, then something occurs in the story that introduces conflict. Eventually the conflict is resolved. We met the characters in John's story two Sundays ago. Several of those characters acted as witnesses affirming the identity of Jesus. Today's story of the cleansing of the temple introduces the conflict. There is going to be conflict throughout this gospel culminating with Jesus' crucifixion and death.

Is there good news, gospel, in today's text? We get one hint of it in verse 22, "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." Scholars think that John's gospel was written to a community that had been forced out of their synagogue/church because they believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They had been ostracized, experienced broken family relationships and the loss of friends because of their beliefs. John reminds his audience of a fundamental belief by writing the phrase, "After he was raised from the dead." He wants to bolster their faith in Jesus and remind them of just what it is that they believe: *He was raised from the dead.*

As I said at the beginning, we are in the midst of a time when emotions are running at a fevered pitch. We may feel like the earth is shaking beneath us. (One of Martin Luther's favorite psalms was Psalm 46) He too lived in tumultuous times. And yet he knew: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. (v7)" We also have one that is our refuge, our strength, and a very present help in trouble. You know his name: Jesus! Jesus, the one who was raised from the dead. He is our keeper; he is our shade at our right hand. Jesus will keep us from

all evil; he will keep our lives. He will keep our going out and our coming in from this time on and forevermore. Amen.