

Lent 3 B – 03/03/2024

Worship is about connecting with God in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament there were a number of temples in Jerusalem. God gave King Solomon the task of building the first temple. It was a sacred place that specific sacrifices were carried out to God by a priest. It was where God was believed to be present, where God wanted to connect with people.

As temples were demolished and built up God's presence was not confined to the temple. The temple of course was still a meeting place for God's people, and they still did sacrifices, but as we heard in today's lesson, they were using it to make money. Jesus was not happy about it and this is one of the only times in scripture that we see Jesus angry.

Can you imagine Jesus with a whip of cords chasing the merchants out of the temple? On one hand it was customary for people to buy animals for a sacrifice, but they were extorting people. Jesus tried to tell them that this system was not what God wanted anymore. Jesus was God's presence.

Of course, the Jewish leaders then asked Jesus, what authority do you have to say this? Jesus answer was not literal. He said, destroy the temple and in three days I will raise it up. They responded, the temple has been under construction for forty-six years, so how he could it be raised up in three days.

Jesus was speaking of his body as the temple. After he was raised, his disciples remembered that he had said this. This helped them to believe the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

There was also a group of Jews who had chosen to believe in Jesus. They had been basically kicked out of their community. Jesus' actions and words sustained them in their belief in Jesus. They then further believed that God's presence was in Jesus.

Jesus was trying to introduce a new system, a new way or place to experience God's presence. On one hand Jesus was pointing out to the people in the market place that they abused the system and were more interested in exploiting people in their practices. But on the other hand, Jesus was turning their system upside down and the Jewish authorities were wondering who the person was that seemed to be changing what God had taught them.

In reality, God had been trying for thousands of years to get people's attention. He provided leaders, judges, kings and prophets and they still continued to break the covenant that they had agreed to. God decided that God needed to come down now and try to help them get back to their covenant. It seemed the only

way to get their attention was to turn the system upside down and in this case, literally turn the tables over.

Most of us have been brought up coming to church to learn about God in Jesus Christ. Lutherans have not always been good about teaching how to share what we learn outside the doors of the church. Thus, today I would like us to think about the importance we place on the sacredness of this building and specifically today the sanctuary.

This past Tuesday we had the presidential primaries here. Someone did not like the fact that they were being held in a church. Technically they were not even in the sanctuary. Somehow just the building represented something that they were uncomfortable with.

For us this is a place to gather to worship our Creator, Redeemer and sustainer. It is a place that the beloved community comes together to be strengthened and nourished through word and sacrament to carry out Jesus' work. We believe that through word and sacrament that Jesus is in us. Thus, when we leave the doors of the church, Jesus then goes out into the world.

So even when we believe that we come to meet Jesus in this worship space, Jesus leaves with us when we leave. Jesus is in people not objects. I had a conversation with a colleague this past week about how we think about reverencing the altar. I pondered the question, are we reverencing an object or is Jesus presence in the altar? I often do it, but do I know why.

Maybe we should be reverencing each other. If we believe that Jesus presence is in us, how do people sense that? How does our life, through word and action represent Jesus?

It is very easy to compartmentalize our faith into this building, just as the people did in our Gospel lesson for today. How often do we talk about Jesus outside this place? Our building and our worship time together, is a gift to be able to have what we need, to bear the cross together.

Sometimes the older that we get, the easier it is just to come and worship the same way that we have always done it. It is comfortable and yes it's familiar, but does it motivate us to enliven Jesus in us and stay enlivened in us when we leave worship. My experience thus far in worship here, is that we are kind of in the middle of the road.

There are some who do not like sung liturgy. There are some who will sing more lively songs, but it is not always what they are comfortable with. It is not about right or wrong, but it is about what people experience when they come to worship.

Today after worship we will have food and fellowship and begin to answer the big question: who are we by discussing these three questions:

- 1) What initially brought you to Faith Lutheran Church?
- 2) What keeps you involved at Faith Lutheran Church?
- 3) If you were to create an advertisement to invite someone who is new to the community to Faith Lutheran Church, what would you include in the advertisement?

I believe that what we are trying to do is describe who we are and really what Jesus likes look to others here and out in the world. How do we represent Jesus as Christians who worship at Faith Lutheran Church? This sounds like something that is difficult to do.

In reality, it is, but remember that we are not producing Jesus. God in Jesus Christ is in us as individuals and has gifted Faith Lutheran Church with all of you and those who are not able to be with us today. It is about sharing the gifts that have been brought together in this beloved community in the best way that we can. We will never be perfect at it and God knows that. I don't believe most people are looking for any perfect group or person.

Our challenge today is to rediscover our giftedness and how we share it. We gather to be strengthened through word and sacrament here in worship to experience Jesus. Jesus then goes backout with us into the world. This is how we allow Jesus to shine through us that others may experience his love and be invited in his presence.