

## CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

***<sup>12</sup> And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all those who were buying and selling in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who were selling doves. <sup>13</sup> And He \*said to them, "It is written, 'MY HOUSE SHALL BE CALLED A HOUSE OF PRAYER'; but you are making it a ROBBERS' DEN."***

***<sup>14</sup> And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them.***

Beloved in the Lord,

Today is Palm Sunday. It is the beginning of Holy Week. Today we commemorate the day Jesus entered Jerusalem for the last time. It was a tremendous, joyful and noisy day. The crowds were upbeat and hailed Jesus as King. Cries of Hosanna rang out in the street as well as in the temple.

The interesting thing is that one of the first things that Jesus did arriving in Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple.

The problem was that the Pharisees and Sadducees had turned the Temple into a market place. The Temple was no longer primarily a place of worship, but a market place. There was more emphasis on selling and money making than on prayer. We have to always be on guard not to lose perspective and not to move off centre.

Last Sunday we looked at the Cross, and considered the importance of keeping the Cross at the very centre of our faith and our lives. We saw that the cross divides between the believer and the unbeliever; but also that it unifies all believers. It is important that we keep our focus on the Cross. If we do not, then our churches can easily go the way of the temple in Jerusalem.

At that time, religion was less about honouring and worshipping God and more about making profits out of the sacrifices. That is why Jesus reacted so strongly. He was overcome by Godly anger.

I have often emphasised that true religion, true Christianity is about relationships and not the keeping of rules and ordinances. Upholding traditions of men. A person can be very religious, but be an unbeliever. You can keep all the rules, observe all the ordinances and still be hard hearted and unbelieving, unyielding to God's Spirit and Will.

Please do not get me wrong – I am not against religious activities, traditions and ordinances, but as Luther stressed – they must serve us and not we them.

Jesus' anger was levelled at those who had changed that which should have been an aid to faith into a business activity. Nothing much has changed since that time. There are many Churches that are not much more than a business – a market place for music, books, DVD's, Holy Water, Relics, Icons and so forth.

What is important, is to allow Jesus to come in and clean out all that is not good and pleasing and honouring to Him. To remove all that hinders a person from growing in true love and devotion to Him. A while ago we considered the prayer at the end of Psalm 139 where David writes:

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; <sup>24</sup> And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.

We should pray this prayer everyday during this Holy week. It will bring us great blessing. Allow God to cleanse you from all that is not good, from all that does not honour Him. We live in a dirty and corrupt world. We have an enemy who unceasingly, untiringly battles away at us trying to separate us and draw us away from God. One of his main arenas for doing his dirty work is the Church community. He is active in the Church and is always trying to cause division and animosity amongst Christians. He is always trying to derail us and cause us to lose focus upon Jesus and to go off on a tangent.

The Christian Churches greatest problems come from within, not from without. False teachings, false prophets, divisions, arguments, unfaithfulness, gossip – all come from within. If Satan can achieve that the Word of God is not preached fully and truthfully; that people get hung up on traditions and works and rules; that Christians gossip about one another and become judgemental and proud; that arguments erupt over trivial things, then he rubs his hands in glee.

We need to ask and allow Jesus to cleanse the temple. Pray that He point out to us that which is not good, then we need to repent and make changes. We must begin at our own self. The late archbishop Arnolds Lusia wrote in the Church yearbook for 1974 this prayer:

“Lord awaken Your Church – and begin with me! Renew Your Congregation – and begin with me! Make peace and goodwill rule over the world – and begin with me! Bring love and truth to all men - and begin with me!”

Begin with me – Lord!

May we use these days before Easter to give our temple a good clean. Let us cleanse our own personal temple as well as our corporate temple our Church. Let us ask that the Lord would show us things from His perspective and not ours. Many of our problems arise from the fact that we view things from a human, fleshly, carnal perspective and not a Godly one. We get carried away with the external trappings and leave the inner man starved. Many are slaves to tradition and have lost Christ and so are not blessed.

Some don't come to Church, because they don't like the robes the pastor wears, or they don't come to the Lord's Table because the way it is celebrated is different to how it used to be or they think it should be. This is what slavery to tradition can do. It can make you spiteful and resentful and angry. You become blind and miss the important things.

We must allow Jesus to come in, to cleanse, to sanctify, to free us. When we are free indeed then we see and understand things from a completely different perspective. We see that the external things are really not that important, and we are able to cope with change and variety.

This is why Jesus had the very interesting conversation with the Jews about slavery and freedom.

We read in John's gospel:

“<sup>31</sup> So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” <sup>33</sup> They

answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, 'You will become free'?"

<sup>34</sup> Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. <sup>35</sup> The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. <sup>36</sup> So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. <sup>37</sup> I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. " John 8:31-37

You see only Jesus can set us free. Only Jesus can cleanse us, truly cleanse our temple Only Jesus can set us upon and keep us on the right path.

The key is in the above quoted passage where Jesus said: " If you continue in My word."

When we do not continue in His word, when we rely upon the traditions of men and the wisdom of man, then we become slaves.

The invitation today on Palm Sunday, is for each one of us to humble ourselves before Almighty God and to pray: "Cleanse Thou me. Cleanse my temple. Cleanse my house, cleanse my Church. Take out everything that is displeasing to You. Change my thinking, and release me from all that enslaves and keeps me from fullness. Remove from me the burden of slavery and let me experience true freedom. Open Thou my eyes to see things as You see them. Open my ears to hear Your word. Open my heart to believe upon You and to trust You and to obey You. Open my mouth to proclaim Your glory and Your glory alone.

I close with the words of St. Frances of Assisi:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
to be consoled as to console;  
to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.  
For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

**Amen.**

Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.

All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.