***Shiloh United Methodist Church***

John 2:13-22 Rev. Tyler Amundson March 7, 2021

 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

***Again and Again, We Are Shown The Way***

**John 2:13-22, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 (CEB)**

John 2:13-22

**Jesus in Jerusalem at Passover**

**13**It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14**He found in the temple those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves, as well as those involved in exchanging currency sitting there. **15**He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and the sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency. **16**He said to the dove sellers, “Get these things out of here! Don’t make my Father’s house a place of business.” **17**His disciples remembered that it is written, *Passion for your house consumes me.*[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+2%3A13-22%2C+1+Corinthians+1%3A18-25&version=CEB#fen-CEB-26102a)]

**18**Then the Jewish leaders asked him, “By what authority are you doing these things? What miraculous sign will you show us?”

**19**Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.”

**20**The Jewish leaders replied, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?” **21**But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body. **22**After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

**Human wisdom versus the cross**

**18**The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are being destroyed. But it is the power of God for those of us who are being saved. **19**It is written in scripture: *I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent*.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+2%3A13-22%2C+1+Corinthians+1%3A18-25&version=CEB#fen-CEB-28365a)] **20**Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today’s debaters? Hasn’t God made the wisdom of the world foolish? **21**In God’s wisdom, he determined that the world wouldn’t come to know him through its wisdom. Instead, God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of preaching. **22**Jews ask for signs, and Greeks look for wisdom, **23**but we preach Christ crucified, which is a scandal to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. **24**But to those who are called—both Jews and Greeks—Christ is God’s power and God’s wisdom. **25**This is because the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Please pray with me as we begin our time together:

Creator God,
We don’t just want to listen.
We want to hear you.
We want to read scripture aloud and
Know that you are as close as you have always been. We want to read scripture aloud and
Feel your word resonating inside our bones.
We want to read scripture aloud and
Have your words stuck in our heads like a melody, Falling off our lips like a love song.

Creator God,
We don’t just want to listen,
We want to hear you.
So turn our hearts toward you,
Just as you turned strangers into disciples. Turn our ears toward you,
Just as you turned tables in the temple. We are listening.
Amen.[[1]](#footnote-1)

I walked into the room and you could feel the tension dripping off the rafters. You could tell each person coming in was wondering where their allies were. If you knew someone, you found them and sat next to them just to know you had someone close who had your back. As I settled into my chair, on one side was another pastoral colleague, on the other a man that I did not know. He stuck out his hand to shake mine. I returned the shake and introduced myself, and he shared his name and said, “Based on the sticker you are wearing, I think we are on opposite sides of this one.” I looked down my shirt as he sized up my clergy collar to realize I had received a sticker from one of the proponents of the issue I would speak to as a Pastor.

The room in the Capitol building got tighter and tighter with people until folks lined the sides of the room, and others were asked to wait outside until they were invited in to testify. Then the legislators strolled in, some casual and others rushed. They sat around the table in their reserved seats.

Then testimony began for those supporting the issue at hand. People shared deeply how this new law would make a difference. One person shared that she had lost her job because her employer could discriminate against her for who she was, and she had no legal recourse. Another person was in tears before she stood to share that her and her daughter had been refused affordable housing, because the landlord had said, “We don’t rent to your kind of people.” Somewhere in all that myself and my peer got up and shared our voice too.

Then the other side of the issue rose to speak to their point of view. Unfortunately, their understanding was nothing but veiled ways to tell others they were evil, or unworthy, or even not children of God. A few legislators interjected and asked people to speak in a civil way, but you can say mean and awful things with a lot of pretty words.

While the tension increased I looked over to where a police officer stood the whole time. I had thought when I first saw him…if this goes south…if the tension gets to much in this room, at least he has all the gear he needs: tazers, pepper spray, handcuffs, and a gun. It always is striking to me how police really do have utility belts like batman. Somehow having him with all his gear made me feel safer, but God had a surprise coming for me.

After the opponents said all the awful things in pretty words. Proponents and opponents were asked questions by legislators. One of the opponents got up, and was saying some pretty awful things about people in the room. The person who had testified to losing access to a home for herself and her daughter was sitting in front of me. I saw her shoulders crunch up and her face go forward into her hands. I could hear the physical sobs from her, the tension finally began to drip from her eyes. Most of the people in the room couldn’t or didn’t know what to do with the emotion, the man saying the awful things wouldn't even change his language much when asked by legislators.

Suddenly, in the middle of this man’s awful words the police officer walked over to the podium. The office didn’t reach for one of his many tools, he reached for a box of Kleenex that had been sitting on the podium the whole time….a tool in the room I did not expect to need in the tension, and he looked at the man saying the awful things and walked the Kleenex box to the young woman.

Flipped tables can be many things in our world, but they are rarely the things we think they are going to be.

In our scripture today, we see Jesus full of emotion in both his actions and the words he shares. We see Jesus seem foolish to the rule keepers, dangerous to the profiteers, and emotional to the disengaged.

Most preachers tell the basics of this story. Jesus has gone into the temple to flip tables of those who are profiting off people seeking to do what is required by Jewish law. People are required to purchase animals to be sacrificed to God by Jewish law, and in Jesus’ day there is a significant markup on those purchases. Jesus is tired of people profiting upon those who do not have enough to begin with, and now even their desire to offer things to God is being profited from.

Christians have often interpreted this to be anger about worshipping the right thing, that Jesus wanted all the sacrifices out of the temple because they no longer were important. However, in my experience Jesus, when speaking to his Jewish brothers and sisters, was far more often trying to point out where people were being exploited, not to tell them they were wrong for choosing different ways to access God.

In some ways by choosing the answer that Jesus was throwing out Jewish law allows us to circumvent the experience people must have had when tables flipped.

Upending a table is no small thing and it is not something you do without some forethought…think about it for a minute. It disrupts an entire room when furniture falls and when someone marches around a room moving multiple items of furniture…that takes some physical effort and deeply emotional energy. Anger, fury, deep sadness, the sweat on the brow from the effort, the spit as folks are told to stop the thing that they are doing. This moment would have caught the attention of everyone in the space and would have alerted authorities of all kinds. People would have been upset, confused, and frustrated by the chaos.

Emotions would have run high and human nature is to calm those emotions.

Jesus was not trying to upend tradition, but instead uphold it in this moment. The Jewish tradition had deep roots of justice and a hope to provide access for all people to the practices that got people in right relationship with God. Jesus saw a serious stumbling block and sought to show how the act that many would see as foolish, might wake them up. And he did it by being fully human to show us that to uphold God’s dream for the world will take our whole self, our emotions, our body, sometimes Kleenex boxes, sometimes table flipping, and even that it will sometimes take well place fury and anger.

Jesus according to tradition is fully God and fully human…he was showing us the need for our humanity to follow God’s dream and that every drop of our humanity might be needed, bodies, emotions and all.

Most years, the other place I find a reminder of this is when I read *Letter from Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King Jr.. You can find this letter freely online. In the letter, King is responding from his jail cell to eight white religious leaders who called the actions of non-violent protest “inconvenient.” They were the same as the authorities in our gospel story today. Lunch counter sit-ins, bus boycotts, and marches were no different than the clatter of a loud table in the temple court. I wonder if the people in Jesus day would have used the same words with Jesus.

“Jesus we understand that it isn’t right to take more money from people who can’t afford food. However, flipping tables is just not the right way to make a change for this. In time we will change the laws, but not now.”

It could be argued that Martin Luther King Jr.’s movement was not even as extreme as Jesus’ flipping of tables. Sitting is not even like flipping a table. However, it does take your whole self to sit in a place you may get dragged from.

King would say this from his cell in August 1963,

“IN ANY nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices are alive, negotiation, self-purification, and direct action. We have gone through all of these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying of the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of police brutality is known in every section of this country. Its unjust treatment of Negroes in the courts is a notorious reality. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in this nation. These are the hard, brutal, and unbelievable facts. On the basis of them, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the political leaders consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.”

King’s message of how to bring about changes to civil rights was not the only one at the time. There were others calling for violence and revolution. King worked hard with other leaders to clarify the principles of non-violence and to seek true transformation of the soul of our country. In his letter was a challenge for the Christian church.

King challenged the church by saying,

There was a time when the church was very powerful. It was during that period that the early Christians rejoiced when they were deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was the thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Wherever the early Christians entered a town the power structure got disturbed and immediately sought to convict them for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But they went on with the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven" and had to obey God rather than man. They were small in number but big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." They brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contest.

Things are different now. The contemporary church is so often a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. It is so often the arch supporter of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's often vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If the church of today does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authentic ring, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. I meet young people every day whose disappointment with the church has risen to outright disgust.

Finally, in his letter, he outlined that someday we would celebrate the heroes who were, really were heroes of that day. Old women who road buses, and young men at lunch counters.

Here are King’s words,

One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, courageously and with a majestic sense of purpose facing jeering and hostile mobs and the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman of Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity, "My feets is tired, but my soul is rested." They will be young high school and college students, young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience's sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for the best in the American dream and the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage.

Flipping tables…perhaps God is flipping a table in your life today.

Where might you be called to upend oppression in our world today? Who will you stand with and proclaim Christ’s love with?

Is it Native Americans who are constantly disenfranchised in our community, and stereotyped. Will it LGBTQIA people who face real oppression and do not have ordinance protection in our city? Will it be the poor who not only live on our streets, but surf the couches of family and friend's?

Jesus’ table flipping is a call to remember that until all people have access to their practices that help them be right with God, then upending will be our reality. May we hear this scritpture in our bones this day.

Shalom and Amen.

1. www.sactifiedart.org [↑](#footnote-ref-1)