

If you were going to select a key verse from our gospel lesson which verse might it be? Let's look at it again with that in mind.

<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> 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.

Which verse or phrase caught your attention as being key?

There are many correct answers to that question. I think whatever verse or phrase that you selected has within it a meaning that tugs at your heart at this particular time. We might look at this same gospel passage next year during the Lenten season and another verse or phrase might jump out at you. That is one way that scripture is inspired. A particular passage of scripture will speak to our hearts depending upon what is happening in our life. God's word gives us guidance or insight for our particular needs at any moment in our lives. Scripture is inspired in that way.

Which verse or phrase caught your attention as a key verse? Remember that verse. Spend some time with it this week. Remember and repeat it during your times of prayer. See how God can bless your life with that verse for this time in your life.

The phrase that caught my attention was found in verse 16.

"Take these things out of here!"

Has anyone shared such words with you before? I can remember a number of times walking in the house, wiping my boots or shoes, and still hearing, "take those things out of here!"

"Take these things out of here!"

As I was reading this gospel passage these words of Jesus that are followed by an exclamation point gained my attention. I expect Jesus' words to be soothing and caring as he is interacting with someone with an ailment of one sort or another. I expect Jesus' words to be engaging and even entertaining as he shares a parable that stretches our worldview. I expect his words to have an even tone to them as he is teaching codes of conduct or concepts of God. I am caught off guard when his words are harsh and punctuated with an exclamation point!

"Take these things out of here!"

Everything in the verses before this phrase build up to it and everything in the verses that follow provide some explanation. The things that Jesus wants "out" are the cattle, sheep, and doves along with the money changers. All these things were located in the outer courts of Temple during the time of Passover. Please remember that Passover was and is the major holiday for Jews. As an observant Jew, Jesus himself, traveled with his disciples to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover at the Temple with other Jews who have traveled from all parts of Israel to their capital city.

The Passover celebration included hearing scripture read at the Temple, particularly the chapters from the book of Exodus that helped them remember God freeing the Hebrews from generations of slavery in Egypt. They loved hearing the stories of Moses, crossing the Red Sea, the receiving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai, and finally crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. During Passover celebrations they would have great feasts with family and friends at their places of lodging throughout Jerusalem. The Passover celebration included singing of songs and sharing in times of prayer in the Temple. It also included lifting up offerings. Their offerings were not monetary like our offerings as we pass around the collection plates. Their offerings included cattle, sheep and doves. Jesus did not frown on that, per se.

What made Jesus mad was that the sacred offerings lifted up to God had been turned into a crass form of money making for Temple leaders and their employees. The faithful had been offering cattle, sheep and doves as a sign of thanks to God at the Temple for centuries. That was okay. In fact, it was following the instructions of the Torah found in the books of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. The scam was found in the money changers. The Temple officials said that the people had to exchange the money they used each and every day for Temple money in order to purchase the needed sacrifice. The exchange rate was high and the Temple leaders were getting rich off of all the people coming to the Temple to worship God. That is why we hear Jesus yell, "Take these things out of here!" The money changers had nothing to do with the worship of God during the high holy days of Passover but they were a scam to line the pockets of the powerful.

"Take these things out of here!"

Would Jesus have any reason to use those words if he visited us here at St. Paul? I think we are safe in regards to anybody getting rich because of employment here at St. Paul. In fact, I think if Jesus looked at our church budget he would commend all the employees because their salaries indicate that the people who work here do so in response to a call of God in their lives. Yet, there are particular days that Jesus might walk in here when a lot of our space looks like a marketplace with things being sold and people receiving money and providing change. I don't think Jesus will make a whip of cords or flip over any of the tables because he would know that all monies being raised are for charitable purposes to help others in need. In fact, I think Jesus would bless us with a smile.

"Take these things out of here!"

Would Jesus have any reason to use those words if he followed us home, perused our check books or credit card accounts, observed our relationships, examined our professional practices, or scrutinized our hearts? Would Jesus be prompted to say, "Take these things out of here!"?

It is a good spiritual exercise during the Lenten season to see what needs to be "in" and what needs to be "out" of our lives as we find our way forward with Christ.

A Way Forward is our Theme this Lenten season.

What holds you back from moving forward with Christ?  
How might it get out of your life?

What helps you move forward with Christ?  
How can that be included in your life?

What holds you back from moving forward with Christ?

One thing that holds me back from moving forward with Christ is getting fixated on a negative experience or comment. I may have had ten good things happen during a day but if I get fixated on one bad thing my mind becomes a like a swirling funnel and I start to feel like crap being flushed down a toilet. Fixating on a negative experience holds me back from moving forward with Christ.

How might it get out of my life?

I can choose to celebrate all the positive experiences and that gives me the strength to address any negatives in a healthy fashion.

What helps you move forward with Christ?

One thing that moves me forward with Christ is intentionally remembering that I am loved. Feeling loved gives me energy live life as John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, encourages us to do. That is,

Do all the good you can,  
by all the means you can,  
in all the ways you can,  
in all the places you can,  
at all the times you can,  
to all the people you can,  
as long as ever you can.

How can that be included in your life?

Remembering all the love in my life is essential and I intentionally remember the love in my life at the beginning of each day. I get down on my knees and I thank God for the many people who shower me with love and my spirit grows stronger as I name one person after another until I am full and then I just conclude with “and everyone else that I have left unnamed this morning. Amen!” Mom and Dad are always in my recital, Marjorie in always on that list, my children are always on that list, Jesus is always on that list, and some days a number of you are on that list. Thank you.

It is a good spiritual exercise during the Lenten season to see what needs to be “in” and what needs to be “out” of our lives as we find our way forward with Christ. In that process we will hear the voice of Jesus saying, “get these things out of here!” and we can then agree and go about the task of removing them as we find a way forward with Christ.