**John 2:13-22 March 7, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for this morning comes from the Gospel of John the 2nd chapter here re-reading these words. “And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen.” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What happened to the good old days? The days when you could turn on your television set and watch classic Westerns like Bonanza, The Riflemen, Gunsmoke, and many more. These shows aren’t necessarily from my generation, but I have seen them, as hard as that may be to believe. I sit and watch these classics with my Father-In-Law when we go to visit them in Northern Wisconsin. I am no expert though, I would always get them confused with each other because to me they seemed so similar, but the one that I never mistook was Rawhide. Here was a group of men out on the frontier, driving cattle from one place to another. You probably remember the theme if you’ve seen the show. Living around people for so many years who actually owned cattle I learned that the way it was done back then compared to how it’s done today is very different. Cattle just kind of roam around the land that a farmer owns. Of course there was always the Sunday night tradition that I heard of where you would go out in a truck or a four wheeler and check your cattle. You weren’t necessarily driving them across the plains though. You didn’t have to worry about bandits or too many predators like you would in the Wild West days. But if the show rawhide taught me anything it’s that driving things from one place to another isn’t easy, and it certainly isn’t always fun.

Jesus here in our Gospel lesson shows us what driving out really means by creating a whip and going into the temple. The word for what Jesus does to the money changers, and the oxen, and the sheep is ek ballo. It is the same word that is used to describe how the Holy Spirit drives out Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted in the Gospel of Mark. And the English translation is Drive out but this also gives a force that can mean “cast out, or expel, or even *throw* *out.”*  Jesus shows righteous anger or an even better word would be zeal and casts out this evidence of sin from the house of His Father. This makes Christ sound more like a sheriff of the Old West rather than a cowboy driving cattle on the plains, but if he was a sheriff then the question remained. It’s the same one that the Jews ask him after he’s done cleansing the temple. “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” or really what they are asking is, “By what authority do you do these things.”

Of course Jesus didn’t have a badge to show, really if we stop and think about it he didn’t have much earthly authority at all. He was in the eyes of a random passerby, exactly what the skeptics from his hometown would say about him, asking “Isn’t that the son of the local carpenter?” He was a nobody from a nothing town, walking into a sacred space, and causing chaos. He doesn’t just physically cleanse the temple with his actions, but he creates even more chaos and confusion by what he says next. “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.”

Why was Jesus doing these things? Well, in the same motivation as the cowboys on the plains, he was doing it, because it had to be done. Now, I will be the first to admit that I have very little knowledge of raising cattle. My Father was a pastor, my mother was a teacher, my brothers aren’t farmers, my grandparents weren’t farmers. But even a complete beginner like me understands that cows need to eat and that there’s only so much food for a cow on a particular piece of land. So cattle would have to be moved around in order to find areas where they could eat. Why did the cowboys move the cattle? Because it had to be done. In the same way, that’s why Jesus shows so much zeal in His cleansing of the temple.

Zeal is a word that we don’t use very often. Zeal is what we would better describe as showing great passion for, or even better as Luther defines it “angry love or jealous love” Some have wrongly taken this passage of Scripture as evidence that Jesus wasn’t perfect and that He sinned. But his anger is never described as hatred. Anger isn’t sinful, hatred is. Hatred is wishing death upon someone or something. Anger can spring up from disappointment. What Jesus is really doing here at the beginning of His ministry in the Gospel of John, is showing his love by removing the evidence of Sin from his Father’s house. He does it because it must be done, just like his promise about the temple. Listen to his words to the Jews about the temple, he doesn’t say “When I destroy it” he says to them, “Destroy it.” They misunderstand this statement to be in reference to the building itself, but this is, like last week, another instance of Jesus predicting his death, as John points out later in these verses, that the disciples understood only after He died and rose again.

He came, with authority, to drive out the evidence of sin from the temple of God. He does this with a motivation of zeal, an angry love in order to cleanse and save this once holy place. He drives out or casts out the iniquity of money gouging and unrighteous acts from a place of holiness and righteousness. And he does the same today. He comes to you, full of the evidence of sin in your hearts, and he comes to drive out the evidence of evil that we all cling to and have fallen prey to in our lives.

He does it, because it must be done. He does it because life everlasting cannot be ours if we remain in our sinfulness. He shows us our sin, in his angry love, by exposing our faults and our wrongs, by holding up the mirror of the perfection of the Law and saying You are not good enough. He comes to drive out the parasites of sin that have infected us and corrupted us.

And what is our response? Sadly we don’t see our need for a Savior and we become defensive. We put up our shields of self-righteousness and start to make demands of God. Wait a minute God, who are you to say that what I’m doing is wrong? Who are you to say that I’m a sinner? What authority do you have over my life? We’ve all been tempted to see ourselves as the reason for everything that we have, and to think that we have complete control over our lives. We, as God’s fallen creation, instead of welcoming God’s love for us in the form of his zeal to destroy the sin in our lives, choose to love the creation of our God, rather than the Creator himself. We turn away. We fail to be obedient children of Our Heavenly Father.

Which is why Christ again points us to where our eyes remain in this Lenten season. The place where the temple was destroyed. For the temple was the evidence of God’s presence with His people, and the sacrifices and the animals that were paid for in this holy place all pointed to the one who came, and drove the animals away. Jesus Christ, is the light of the world as we sing on Wednesday Nights in Evening Prayer. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, we see him identified in many and various ways. Well, here we see that Christ drives away the other animals of sacrifice because he is the lamb of God, the final sacrifice. He is the fulfillment of this sacrificial system that couldn’t possibly save the people from their sins. Only Christ could. Only Jesus, the evidence of God’s love for his people, standing in the flesh, speaking to the Jews, and reaching out to them in order to save them. And he still reaches out to you today. Through His Word, with His love, in order to save you from your sins.

For the cross is the final answer when it comes to life’s sadness and pain. The cross is the final moment of victory over the disease and the corruption of this world. The cross is the focal point of Lent because without the cross we would be lost forever. And amazingly, God dies for us, while we were rebellious and enemies of Him. While we still demanded signs and evidence of his authority. And he does all the work of our salvation. He personally paid the price for our sinfulness by dying and suffering on the cross. He dies for you, personally, to drive out the sin and shame of your heart and draw you closer. And now, he has claimed you as His own. Now you are his alone and salvation and life everlasting is yours. Throughout his entire ministry he shows his love in the things he does for His people to teach them, and show them His authority. Because it had to be done, salvation wouldn’t be found in anyone else but Jesus Christ; the perfect Son of God.

So go with the joy of the cross and be cleansed by its message of salvation. Take that message to others, and share with them the truth of their sin and shame with zeal. God will use you as His instrument in these moments, giving you the words to say and drawing the lost to himself through you. For God has called us to be more than just sinners clinging to our lives of sin, he’s called us to be temples of His Holy Spirit, temples that this world may destroy someday through its hatred. But temples that will be raised up to be with Our Heavenly Father forever when Christ comes again. May God be with you this day and always as we continue our journey to the cross and finally to the empty tomb.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.