

- Rev. Grant Mangold, www.RiversideChurchIowa.com

TEMPLE TANTRUM ??

At the wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine as a sign that the times they were a-changin'. The old order was passing away. Jesus had come -- with God's Kingdom. He took that momentum to Jerusalem. His next sign involves the temple and that starts with T and rhymes with P which stands for problems because Jesus found deeply troubling problems right here at the temple.

Only Jews were allowed into the inner areas. But King Herod expanded the outer prayer area, "the court of the Gentiles" to more than a quarter-mile long. During festivals, religious authorities allowed trading stalls for people to exchange currencies, pay the temple tax, and buy animal sacrifices.

The last time Scripture records Jesus at the temple, He was 12 years old, amazing Jewish teachers and telling His parents, "***Didn't you know I would be in My Father's house?***" This time, in John 2:13-25, Jesus rebukes religious leaders and drives out traders with a whip, saying "***do not make My Father's house a house of trade!***" He acted and sounded like an Old Testament prophet, but He claimed an unheard-of personal connection to God. Offended by His works and words, the religious authorities rightly question His authority. "***What sign do you show us for doing these things?***" they asked.

But this sign of the temple is about more than money and managers. The temple courts were meant to facilitate prayer to God. But the religious activities authorized by the religious authorities actually prevented prayer and worship. Their traditions and trading stalls might have been for a "good cause" -- but when Jesus visited that house, He drove them out. Three things for YOU to consider:

1 - How does your consumer mentality result in church-ianity instead of Christ-ianity? Our culture trains you to be consummate consumers, comparing everything to get the best deal. Are you like those who go to church for what they can get out of it, instead of what they can bring to it? Instead of bringing themselves to worship God, serve and encourage others in the faith, and be instructed in God's Word, they prefer a "what's in it for me" attitude. Getting instead of giving. How about you?

G.K. Chesterton said, "*I don't need a church to tell me I'm wrong when I know I'm wrong; I need a church to tell me I'm wrong when I think I'm right.*" Instead, people shop for a church to tell them what they want to hear. But if you've been cleansed by Christ from worldly ways, you'll "do church" all right, but according to God's revealed truth and empowered by the Holy Spirit, not by your own preferences and opinions. How could YOU become more like Christ, consumed by zeal for God's truth?

2 - How do YOU prevent people from coming to Christ? Not only with un-inviting Sundays in how we present ourselves and speak about Jesus and one another, but our words and actions through the week can push people away from Christ instead of pulling them toward Him. Our traditions and methods may be faulty. How can YOU take the initiative to show and tell the clear message of the Good News?

3 - What would Jesus drive out of YOUR house today? Not just consumer stuff you don't really need or can't really afford. What about your heart? Your selfishness? Your worldliness? Jesus came to set you free from sin and self. But driving these out of your heart and will and mind won't be pretty.

By what authority does Jesus do these things? He said, "***Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.***" He was speaking about the sign of His deity, the resurrection of His own body. Scripture says every believer in Jesus becomes a living stone in the temple of His body for His holy habitation. That's when the indwelling Holy Spirit becomes not only your purifier, but your power to live a pure life.

Jesus came to baptize with the Holy Spirit, who makes all the difference in your heart and mind and will, to live out what you believe. Our passage closes with these enigmatic words, "***Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them.***" Church-ianity is just "easy believism" not real life-transforming Christ-ianity.

You see, the only tantrum in the temple that day was in the hearts and minds and wills of people who did NOT truly believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Maybe they gave lip service to Him, but they actually hung on to their own heartless human traditions and mere religious experiences. *Is this true of YOU? Let Jesus drive out all the fake and bring in all the REAL today -- to make YOU a purified temple of the Lord.*