

Title: “I’ll Take a Cup of Worship, Lukewarm, Please.”

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John 2:13-17

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Service Readings: Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, John 2:13-22 (23-25)

Lesson: Through Baptism, the proclamation of the Gospel, and Communion, Jesus serves us with forgiveness, life, and salvation. When we become lukewarm, he has a tendency to wake us up and bring our focus back to him.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

<christ-temple.jpg>

¹³The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade.” ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

The painting is by the Italian artist Benvenuto Tisi and is dated around 1520. The scene depicted has quite obviously been inspired by today's Gospel passage. Jesus is there in the center driving out the animals, turning over the tables, and quite plainly disturbing the comfortable order of things in the temple. And what a disturbance that must have been. Jerusalem was celebrating the Feast of the Passover and so the city was well over capacity - bursting at the seams. People from all over the known world would make their way into the city to celebrate, and the epicenter of that celebration, the place with the most action, was right there at the temple, right there where Jesus placed himself. Surrounding him were thousands of other Jews, all trying to fulfill their duties recorded in the Torah. Each family had a Paschal Lamb, a lamb without blemish. And each lamb would be sacrificed by the priests. And the blood from each sacrificed lamb would be collected in gold bowls. And the collected blood would be sprinkled upon the altar. But lambs weren't the only things sacrificed. There were oxen, pigeons, and even grains that were offered to God. Now, many people traveled light and purchased their sacrificial animals there in the temple. It was like a 7/11 of sorts - convenience at a price. And because the merchants would only accept shekel's all of these people would have to exchange their own currency before they could purchase their animals.

Looking again at the painting, it doesn't even begin to reflect the true chaos of that day. But we can see, there in the foreground, the tables disturbed and the merchants distraught. Their comfortable order of things was being disturbed by Jesus at that very moment.

Now, there in the background in front of Jesus, we see a group of worshipers. They were simply trying to celebrate Passover. And to do this, they needed their sacrificial animals. And to purchase those, they needed to exchange their coins. And to do *that* they needed the very people that Jesus was driving out! What would they do, now? And really, if you think about it from their perspective, his actions didn't make a whole lot of sense. *He* celebrated Passover his whole life **and** his family probably purchased their animals from the same type of merchants during their own preparations. So why was he doing this? Why was he disturbing the comfortable order of things, for these people?

It really had little to do with the merchants... or the money.... or the animals.... It really had little to do with all that chaos and activity. It had much more to do with that tabernacle that Tisi painted in the upper center of the canvas. You see that box up there? The one that has the candles burning behind it? That box that's being ignored by every single person in the painting? There looks to be a priest right next to it - that guy with the beard and the black cloak. He's not watching Jesus and he's not watching the box, either. And that box, the one that is being ignored? That's where God sits. That's where God presides. That's where God has told his people he would live among them. Right there on top of that box. The box that's being ignored.

You see, we read this passage and we make so much of the activity at the temple. We put such emphasis on the trade and transactions. And in our own worship today we place so much emphasis on our own "trade and transactions" - on the music or the format of the service or the lighting or whatever. Sure, some of those sellers were corrupt. And some of those worshipers were there to check a box off so that they could get to the party. But those were just visible signs of the real problem, the heart problem. And it was *the heart* problem that Jesus was confronting that day. God's people had become lukewarm to God! The merchants were there to make money, the people were there to celebrate Passover. Who was there to worship God? And I don't mean attend a synagogue session. I mean worship God. Who was there to reply with praise for all that God had done for his people? For all God was *actively doing* for his people? Sure, some were there for that. Some "got" it. There were probably many, but there were many more who were there to check off that box.

They didn't know it, but they were really celebrating what *was to come*. And, on that day, *what was to come* was standing right in front of them! They didn't know it, but we do. We celebrate not *what is to come* but *what has come*. We celebrate what Jesus has done for us. Shortly after this scene, Jesus would suffer and die. He would suffer bitterly, for us. He would pay for all the sins of the world. And he would conquer death by his resurrection. All for us. His work on earth would be finished, but his heavenly work would not end. He would continue to serve his people - us, for all time.

<pause>

Today, he calls us to our baptismal font and there he serves us through his Word. He calls us to his table and there he serves us with his body and blood. He calls us to gather, and he serves us through the hearing of the Gospel. You see, our worship is not simply a time when we get together as a body and say, "thank you, Jesus for all that you have done." That would be like ignoring the ark - the wooden box in the painting! We don't need to gather in this building to talk to him. We gather

together to be served by him! We stand before the altar, the place where God promises to meet us. We cry out "Lord! We are not worthy of standing before you! We are not deserving of the mercy that you have extended to us!" And Jesus replies "My beloved children, it is true that you are not worthy or deserving. But you are mine and I am yours and because of this you are forgiven." And he says "Come, gather together and let me *serve you*."

<pause>

I need to pause there for a moment. It takes my breath away when I think about it. Our God. The God that created everything from nothing. That God gave up his only son out of love for his creatures. That God wants to *serve* us. That God wants to *serve* you! He calls us to gather so that he can *serve*! And he does this through Jesus. It is almost impossible for me to comprehend! But that's what he does. That's why we gather. Christ serves us completely and selflessly. He offers us forgiveness through the hearing of the Word. He offers us forgiveness through the eating of his body and drinking of his blood.

And, can you imagine, for even just a moment, that some people will visit their church on Sunday to simply check off a box? That some people will come to church on Sunday and think that it's all about them - all about sending a "thank you" to Christ? I can imagine it because I have done it and I'm sure you all have too, at one time or another. Maybe you have come to church right after a dispute with your spouse or child. Or maybe you just have too many things on your mind. Or, maybe you have simply become lukewarm to this whole thing and no longer even begin to comprehend what is happening in the service - that you are being served by God! But thanks be to God that when this happens, Jesus has a way of entering into our own temple and disturbing the comfortable order of things. He messes with our lives, our rituals, our "lukewarmness" and does something that wakes us up and focuses us back to him.

I may not be very happy to see myself in that picture, but I am very happy to see Jesus there - disturbing my comfortable order of things.

Let us pray,

Jesus, enter into my heart, your temple and disrupt it. Wake me from my slumber, shake me from my lukewarmness and reenergize me with passion towards you. Help me remember why I come into this church every week - why I worship every week. I come to be served by you!
In your name we pray. Amen.