Opening Our Lives: Do THIS in Remembrance
Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

John 2:13-22
The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 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. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews then said, “This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?” But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.

In a few minutes, we will join together in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In that meal, shared first on the night of Jesus’ last supper with his disciples, Jesus teaches us that the very bread that is broken and the cup poured out become ways through which we remember him.

Today’s Gospel reading from John that David just read for us places us in a very different circumstance with Jesus, doesn’t it? It’s a troubling scene that troubles us, for it shows us a side of Jesus we don’t often see. Jesus is upset and angry. Entering the Temple, he sees people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and money changers seated at tables. He becomes so furious at what he sees as the commercialization and desecration of the Temple that he makes a whip of cords and drives them all out, upending the tables and pouring out the bags of coins. Imagine the noise, the chaos, the mayhem, the shock of all those present that day.

He goes on to teach about his own coming death and resurrection, but I suggest that before we move to that, we stay for a moment with that picture of an angry Jesus, heartbroken, disgusted, moved to action. “This should not be and this should not continue,” he seems to say. “This makes mockery of what God intends.” “We cannot remain content with what passes for religious practice while outside, in the cities and villages where I’ve been teaching and preaching and healing, God’s people suffer in poverty and fear.” “We cannot let commercialization take the place of compassion.”

What if, while the disciples were still quaking from his angry outburst, what if he had turned to them in that moment and said: “Do THIS in remembrance of me?”

Do what, we might need to ask? Jesus got angry at religion that had turned in on itself. Note that no humans or animals were injured. This was not wanton destruction or mob rule. Jesus was reminding people of faith to pay attention to what is just not right and to speak up. To speak out loud and clear just as God does sometimes, thundering down from the heavens with a voice of re-orienting judgment.

I know we come into worship to find peace and calm and reassurance, in normal times for sure, but especially these days. But I’m going to invite this morning to do one more thing, to open our eyes and minds to the things going on around us that get our blood boiling, the things that just aren’t right in our world. Let’s open our hearts to the painful places in our world. The homeless, the hungry, the hopeless? Where would Jesus place his priorities today?

Jesus’ call to discipleship asks us to consider the natural consequences of loving our neighbors and recognizing the value of all living beings and things. He calls us to get our priorities right. He knows that faithfulness to him and to God’s kingdom, living out his life of compassion and love must be at the top of our priority list.

I’m sure that we’ll all come up with different things and bring different perspectives and interpretations, so we’ll be called to love even those with whom we disagree.
But, still, I think Jesus is inviting us to speak up and speak out in remembrance of him and in remembrance of the call he has placed on our hearts. Compassion starts in our heart and moves outward, embracing more and more of our sisters and brothers. For John Wesley, religious zeal is to be zealous for love.

If we speak up and reach out in our daily lives, if we give of ourselves to do and say what is right, if we remain awake to what we’re seeing and not shut off our humanity to it, the kingdom of God is made real in our lives and communities, in places of darkness, in the lives of those who suffer most, bringing hope to those who think they have no future.

As we prepare our hearts to receive the sacrament this day, let’s again hear our Lenten prayer:

Loving God, in our sufferings and joys, in our relationships and daily lives, we ask that your kingdom come.
Open our eyes to your presence, open our ears to your call, open our hearts to your love, open our ways to your will, open our actions to your compassion, open our pain to your peace, and, in so doing, open our world to your hope.
In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Notes:


John Wesley sermon On Zeal.