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Sermon

John 2:13-22

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### Cheap and Easy

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,  
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

John 2:13-22

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.

Sermon

We've come to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of lent. I hope everyone is doing well with their fasting. No one has really said whether it's going well or not to me personally, so I'm assuming no news is good news. It can be hard to talk about this sort of thing though. Fasting is a very personal practice that is between you and your maker, so talking about with others is a little daunting. But I'd like to offer a warning... don't go through all of Lent without talking to someone about your fast. You don't need to say how well you have done, or tell them how impressive your sacrifice is, but talk to someone about how you feel about it. Has it been hard? Has it been easy? Has it made any difference? Spend some time making your fast more than just a personal journey... make it a shared journey with someone else. Faith isn't meant to be navigated alone.

Anyhow, that was my pre-sermon sermon, had that on my mind this week, but now let's jump into our scripture and see where we land. What strikes me as we look over John chapter 2 is just how... different this is! Jesus has a whip! And is using it! On people!!! What in tarnation is going on?! Maybe I should get a whip? Wouldn't do me any good over this virtual worship... but "my my", you'd listen to then, wouldn't you?!

Jokes aside, this is a remarkable scene where Jesus is not who we expect. Here we see a young man angry, furious, and enraged! He makes a whip and starts using it on people to run them out of the temple. How many pictures can you think of where Jesus is holding a whip? Not many... most likely. No, we are far more used to calmer images, soft and palatable... something like the stained-glass window behind me. Let's look at it. We see...

This communicates to me that Jesus is kind, loving, equitable, and most importantly... not going to mess up my own plans. This guy is a push-over. He's not going to keep me from doing what I want, or tell me I'm living my life wrong. I don't have to actually listen to that guy, I just admire how he lived, and then do what I want. This guy is easy. But, to bring it back to this image of Christ in John's text... Jesus with a whip? This shepherd ain't playing and you better get in line or get out. What's divine about all this is that Jesus isn't just one or the other, Jesus is both, and for us to claim we are Christians, we have to hold the hard and forceful Shepherd image in our thoughts just as much as the soft and calming one. Jesus was a complete person, and complete God.

Why was Jesus so mad about these sellers in the temple anyway? John tells us there were people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and also folks who were changing out money. That doesn't really seem that bad, does it? If you are a Jew and need to go to the temple... you'll need an offering to make a sacrifice. 9 times out of 10, you'll need either a cow, a sheep or goat, or a pair of doves, maybe some grain. Well, how great is it that you can buy those just outside the temple doors? You don't have to drag a cow across town to the temple or sacrifice one of your own, you can just go pick one up on the way in. It's nice and easy. Not to mention, your paid in some Egyptian silver but the temple only likes Roman coins, well now you can change that out too, no problems!

What if I made you bring your own hymnal and bible to church every week? Not only that, you got to print the bulletin at home and bring it, oh... and your own bread and grape juice. Who would forget to bring all that every now and again? Or every week? Yeah, I see you, I think that's most of us. I'm doing good to bring me to church, much less supplies for it as well. That would be a little hard... but I've got good news. Next week... I'll sit on the steps and sell you bread and wine, a hymnal you can borrow for the day, and even bulletins while you drive by... it won't be expensive, just a dollar for each. I'll save you the trouble of getting your own,

I'll make a fair buck, and we'll all be happy because we don't have to think or worry about if we are ready for church.

There are just a few problems in all this. First off... me selling you communion ain't cool. For like... a thousand reasons. But skipping that... what's the next big problem? It's all just too easy. Why do you think God wanted people to bring cattle or sheep for sacrifice? Because it hurt and was hard... it cost you something. Cattle were highly valued and extremely expensive. Sheep and goats weren't exactly cheap either. Doves were cheap, and were the substitute for those in poverty. But these animals required that you raised them, fed them, cared for them. For many people, livestock lived in the household or right next to it. You would see this animal every single day of your life. And once a year you would take your most prized animal up to the temple. You would lead it across town, giving you lots of time to rethink your choice to be obedient to God. This animal could feed your family for weeks... and you're about to let it go for nothing, at least in conventional wisdom. You bring the animal to the temple, the Priest's cut its throat and drain the blood while you watch, then they burn it, cooking it on the fire... and then the priests eat it... And you go home. Nothing about this process is easy, for any Jew. You have to work for it. And it's not meant to be easy... it's meant to be memorable; it's meant to be an act of devotion and it's meant to have meaning on your life.

Anything worth doing is never easy. It's an old saying that my grandfather was always happy to tell me, as if they only took the hardest route possible at all times, which is just blatantly false. They cut corners and took short cuts like the rest of us... old words do have great wisdom... something that is hard to see to those of us who are always in a hurry. Just because it's easy or cheap doesn't make it right and good. It is easy to see Jesus as a man who looked just like me, was always soft and kind, and would never tell me no. A Jesus that confirms my worst parts are fine, instead of challenging me to be better. It is easy to not think about church or other people during the week; we've got plenty of other things taking up our time. It's great that the pastor reads the Bible for us, and prays for us, and does everything for us... means I don't have to do anything but roll over and flip open YouTube. I'll give up chocolate this year for Lent... I don't eat it anyway and it'll be simple to not eat it... and then I won't have to take a lot of time either in adding prayer or bible reading to my schedule. Quick and easy... The American Way.

When I shop... I'm a pretty frugal guy. I'm always on the eye for a deal and I generally go for the cheap things first. I'm always complaining that I can find a cheaper price online or somewhere else. I want the cheap and easy thing most of the time. But I've learned a hard lesson about that over the years. As I went off to college... I quickly learned that there is a TON of stuff you have to buy at Walmart or the grocery store. Things you never thought of because Mom or Dad always handled it. Dish Soap, laundry detergent, bleach, brooms, mops, Lysol, pledge, paper towels, and the absolute most important thing... toilet paper! Especially during pandemics, better have that toilet paper! Being the cheap guy that I am, I made sure to grab the cheapest off-brand stuff, in the biggest and easiest containers. So, I got that industrial size sand paper, Toilet paper... Oh man... what a mistake that was. Cheap and Easy was not the right path at all! I now only buy toilet paper that is name brand and has a fluffy animal on it... it was a ROUGH lesson to learn... and one that I won't forget.

This is what Jesus is getting at when he flips over the temple and runs out the convenience of God. God is inconvenient. It's human wisdom for us to get things as cheap as

possible to save every dollar for ourselves, it's wisdom to do things quickly even if it means skipping thoughtfulness, it's wisdom to prioritize yourself, your pride, your career, your family and leave the community and others for the free time. Jesus disagrees.

God's wisdom is often seen as foolishness and God's strength as weakness. Walter Brueggemann says it like this: "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom... Foolish enough to welcome home a wayward son, foolish to forgive seventy times seven, foolish to pay workers who show up late for work, foolish to feed a crowd with only 2 fish, foolish to stop for a mugged stranger and pay for his healthcare, foolish to defy the rulers of the world.

Brueggemann continues: "The weakness of God is stronger than human strength. People like us have learned how to be strong: don't show any weakness! Have economic strength; keep your job! Have military strength to fend off every threat. Have [mental] strength so as not to be exploited. And then Jesus interrupts us with his dangerous weakness: The weakness of generosity toward those who may exploit, weakness to touch lepers and to heal the undeserving, weakness to enter conflict with the empire and come out as Easter life, weakness of mercy, justice, and fidelity in a world that easily dismisses such practices."

Paul writes to that divided church in Corinth and shares with them the words from Isaiah, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." This is what he means. This is what Jesus is worked up about. We have taken what is meant to be different, difficult even at times, something important and meaningful... and we've made it cheap and easy. We didn't do it on purpose, it was just convenient. But that's what Lent is for... we're fasting, we are looking at our faith life, it's a time of reorganizing and reprioritizing. How can I be less wise and strong... and more foolish and weak... like God?

I want to turn back to the window again. In looking back to this image of Christ, and again comparing it to an image of Christ with a whip and turning over tables... I'm moved by the fact that I act like I'm the one with the strong whip and act less like the weak Jesus who sits with the children. We might put this non-confrontational image front and center in the church, but I don't live it. No, I go through life thinking I'm the one in charge and trying to force others to my way of thinking, whipping them to my way. Ironic, the Jesus we hide from is the one we've become and the Jesus we put in front of our faces is the one we ignore. Perhaps now is a good time to stop standing with "Wisdom and Strength" and flailing our whips all about and actually try sitting down in "foolishness and weakness" with other people, children just like us. Amen.