

THE HOPE JOURNAL

LEARNING TO LOVE, TOGETHER

MARCH 3, 2024



MONEY-CHANGERS

making faith easier

by Drew Downs

The rules are pretty simple. No money in the Temple. Make sacrifices. Be faithful.

Of course, not everybody has livestock to offer. Especially in cities. It is easy to see how a market for livestock and less expensive animals would grow to meet demand.

And since you can't have Roman currency while offering the sacrifice, you need to sell it for Temple currency, right? To buy the animal

you will offer as a sacrifice. It all seems so inevitable and normal.

But we can also see the problem, can't we? Trading a Roman coin for a Temple coin to buy an animal...it's following the letter of the law by destroying the spirit of it.

Apply this to us. We can see why fast food exists. And why we eat it. But that doesn't make it good for us. Apply this to everything.

LENT

2024

WHAT'S GOING ON

*"You know we've got to find a way
To bring some loving here today".*

-Marvin Gaye

Disciples, Apostles, and Saints!

Faithfulness

Perhaps the most common conversation in Lent is about discipline. About what we choose to give up or take on. How we are marking the time and what personal rules we are setting for ourselves.

And because this is the most common conversation, I try to make other conversations *more* common. Like what *insights* we hope to gain from this discipline. Or what we are learning from the process.

I ask about how this intentional behavior is opening us up to God's presence and guidance. And how we are opening ourselves in new ways to our present relationships. I want to get us thinking about how we are attuned to and with God and our neighbors and become more *vulnerable* and seek more *intimacy* this season.

Mostly, though, I remind us of the big picture. That we are in a season of learning. Of growing. And of getting over ourselves. So that when we get to Easter, with all our celebrating and joyful pronouncements, we are able to welcome the change that Easter brings.

This is ancient practice, matching our convictions and theology with our practice. Being people of the resurrection, willing to be changed, growing and learning, showing mercy and receiving it, becoming new creations. And we continue in this tradition, expressing our faith, not just that Jesus died and was raised, but that we do this, too. And for the rest of our lives together.

With love,
Drew

LENT

2024

FOR SUNDAY

Third Sunday of Lent

March 3, 2024

Collect

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading

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.

LENT

Reflection

Few of us feel the same outrage about money and holiness that Jesus shows in this passage. We don't take out whips when the collection plate gets passed around or when we encourage one another to give to fundraisers.

Are these things different? Somewhat. But perhaps not as much as we'd like. But then again, what is it that we actually want? Prohibitions on commerce in the Temple? And just in the Temple, or in general?

It doesn't seem that Jesus is focused on prohibitions—though there already were—as much as the corrupting influence that money itself brings.

Temple practice was developed to make it easier for individuals and families to make sacrifices—even providing for the poorest Hebrews to participate. It was what we might call “ethical commerce.” In other words, this process provided access to nearly all and matched God's commands. So what gives?

Jesus condemns the very idea. Not of the Temple authorities facilitating sacrifice, but of basing the entire endeavor on commerce. Selling things isn't neutral. Systems of commerce aren't neutral. Not to Jesus. And no matter how much we rationalize them.

Jesus didn't come to the Temple to offer a more equitable system of sacrifice and devotion. He didn't champion greater access to the system or reduce systemic bias. Nor did he quietly petition his leaders to reconsider voting against their own interests. He said “Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!”

Dare we offer such a response? To refuse to see faith as transactional, communities of faith as markets, and one another as good consumers! To recognize Jesus as the Temple and our faith, not as currency, but as our very way of life.

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