

“Wake Up and Listen”

John 2:13-22

Third Sunday of Lent

Fourth in Series on Listening to God

Pastor Andy Kinsey

March 7, 2021

“The Passover was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.”

- John 2:13

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, help us to listen to the voice of your Son who comes to overturn our settled-ways and who disrupts our ideas of what it means to worship you and you alone. In Christ’s name, we pray: Amen.

Meditation

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “There is a difference between truly listening and waiting for your turn to talk.” So many times, we can want to speak up, rather than take time to listen.

I think this is especially important with respect to our relationship with God: too many times we want to speak rather listen. We can be impatient. We want things to happen on our own calendar and timeline.

Indeed, I sometime think we can move through Lent without truly listening. We can become confused between having this sense of self-criticism on the one hand (thinking we are never being good enough), or we can attempt to make Lent into a program for self-improvement on the other (just thinking that we can check off a few marks on a spiritual scorecard); both of which are ways we avoid listening.¹ We can beat up ourselves without fully considering the kind of posture we are to have.

As we have been sharing over this season of Lent, the posture we seek is about listening, which, of course, is not so easy to cultivate in a world of constant distraction.

¹ *Preaching the New Common Lectionary: Year B* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 53.

I can remember so well years ago taking a ten-day silent retreat in a monastery in Minnesota. We spent breakfast and lunch in silence. We spent most of the day in silence. Only at dinner were we able to speak. We did so not as a way to avoid God, but actually to listen to God more faithfully, to learn to intercede in prayer for the world. To be sure, it was not always easy to listen in the silence, as I didn't always want to wait for my turn to speak!

And yet, we might ask ourselves, When has listening ever been our strong suit as human beings? Adam and Eve didn't listen in the Garden, did they?² And the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years, all because they didn't listen (Joshua 5:5-6). Maybe this is why Elijah goes into a cave to listen to that "still small voice," just to get away from the all the danger and commotion (1 Kings 19:11-12).

Indeed, as we read the New Testament, not everyone who hears Jesus listens to him! Even the people who received the loaves and fishes and heard what he said didn't quite listen to *what he was really saying* as they tried to make him king (John 6:1-15). They may have heard him speak, but they were not necessarily listening to what he was saying. There is a difference. Maybe this is why Jesus said so often: "Those who have ears to hear, let them hear!" In other words, listen up! Lean forward! Get the potatoes out of your ears, as grandma used to say! Perk up!

In our passage today, Jesus is speaking about destroying the Temple and raising it again in three days (John 2:19). The people and his disciples around him don't understand how he is going to do that. After all, it took forty-six years to build what the Second Temple (John 2:20). And Jesus says that he is going to destroy it and rebuild it in *three days*!³

Jesus is speaking about himself here, but there is also the point that listening and understanding are much more difficult than we might think! What is Jesus really saying?

So if you are just getting out of bed, or if you are just getting that first cup of coffee, wake up and listen: Jesus is doing something here that is a sign of God's glory, and it is, and is not, as straightforward as we might think.

Jesus in The Temple

² Genesis 3:1-5.

³ John 2:19-20.

That is to say, when we read this passage in John's Gospel, we read right off the bat that Jesus is in Jerusalem at the beginning and not at the end of his ministry. That is a major shift from the other three Gospels.

In Mathew, Mark, and Luke, of course, Jesus is at the Temple near the end of his life, and the cleansing of the Temple is the precipitating factor in the decision to kill him.⁴

In John's Gospel, it is at the beginning, just right after his miracle at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11). In a matter of two verses, Jesus goes from the countryside in the north to the heart of the city in the south, to the very heart of Judaism, the Temple, the hub of religion and politics, the center of worship and music.⁵

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus goes into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, and then dismounts at the Temple and turns everything upside down.⁶ In John, Jesus enters Jerusalem to upset the "money changers" and chase out the animals; only later in Chapter 12 does he ride into Jerusalem, and even there it is not clear that he goes to the Temple again (12:11-19).

The point here is not to get caught up in the differences, but to understand *John's* point: after all, no one likes to be taken out of context. I know I don't. I imagine the biblical writers don't either. So let's listen to that.

The point of Jesus with a whip driving out the sheep and the cattle here at the beginning of this Gospel is about sending a message about Jesus' identity and mission. It is a sign that on the Passover (remember it's the Passover) – Jesus is going to lay down his life as a sacrifice and take it up again.⁷ He is going to die and rise again, and through his body draw all people unto himself (John 12:32).

In doing this in the Temple, Jesus is also confronting what had become an unjust system. In fact, the whole focus of worship in the Temple had been lost. Remember that the Temple is where the people would go to draw near to God, to atone for their sin. It was the place where heaven and earth met. Following the Babylonia Exile, the people rebuilt the Temple and found faithful ways to worship God.⁸ The problem was that the Temple had become an *end* in itself. It was

⁴ Matthew 21:12-17, Mark 11:15-19, Luke 19:45-47.

⁵ N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone: Part One* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2002), 25.

⁶ Matthew 21:1-11, Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-40.

⁷ Gilberto Rulz, "Cleansing the Temple: Commentary on John 2:13-25" at www.workingpreacher.org.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *John for Everyone: Part One*, 25.

supposed to be a *means*, but people treated it as an *end*: people began to worship the building rather than the Builder – God!⁹

Put differently: the Temple was ripe for destruction. The Temple had become more concerned about self-preservation than God's glorification, and in Jesus' eyes, this kind of idolatry will always lead to death (which is what will happen, of course, in 70 AD when the Romans burn the Temple to ground).

Maybe this is the wakeup call Jesus is sending early on: as God's Word in the flesh (John 1:1, John 1:14), as God's only begotten Son (John 3:16), as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29) – Jesus is the One in Whom heaven and earth meet. He is the One in whom God's Spirit dwells, just as in the Temple.

In other words, we don't simply reduce our worship of God to a place or a building. We worship God in spirit and in truth, and we come to God through Jesus's own body, by his death and resurrection, which is our Temple (John 4:24).

Jesus' Message

How easy it is for us to make what we build or what we do, the center of it all: the ever ancient, ever contemporary tendency to make the creaturely the Creator!

I mean I love this building of Grace Church. The actual stones and mortar are beautiful. In many ways, it welcomes people into Franklin, standing just off the road.

But if there is something that Pastor Jenothy and I hope we all have learned over the last year – and it has been one year this week since we entered into the pandemic phase of ministry – it is that our worship of God needs to be about God!¹⁰ Not the technology, though important. Not the styles of worship or rituals, though important. Not the architecture, though meaningful. Not the personalities of the pastors and worship leaders. Rather, Jesus' costly lesson here at the beginning of this Gospel is about the true worship of God; it is about realizing *Who* the true end of worship is – Jesus Christ!

And in a world, even in the church, where we can take God's name in vain, or where we can find all kinds of ways to manage or control God, even kill in

⁹ Fred B. Craddock, *John* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 27.

¹⁰ Cf., *Preaching the New Common Lectionary: Year B* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1984), 54.

God's name – this lesson is more important than ever: it calls us to wake up and listen to the ways we all can succumb to making idols of what is even the most beautiful, or even what we care about the most!

Maybe this is what we have been learning over the last year: that our true sanctuary, our true temple, is Christ, and that his body is not contained to a building, but extends through the bonds of relationships, the chords of love.

That as God's Son, as the Lamb of God, Jesus really is the One in whom we see the fullness of God's glory, the One whose death and resurrection will turn this world upside down!

To those who have ears let them hear! Amen.