

## **“Dismantling the Status Quo”**

**John 2:13-22**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

**March 4, 2018 (Third Sunday of Lent)**

In the American Heritage dictionary, “dismantle” is defined as “take apart, tear down, demolish”. “Status quo” is defined as “the existing state of affairs”. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is described as “cleansing the temple”. One may say that he is “tearing down the existing state of affairs”. Jesus is “dismantling the status quo”. If we are disciples of Jesus, if we are to try to follow his example, then when we know something is not good or right, we are not afraid to “tear down the existing state of affairs”. When we know something is not good or right, if we are committed to following the example of Jesus, then we are not afraid to “dismantle the status quo”.

In Jesus’s time, the centrality of the Temple in the routine of Jewish life cannot be overstated. God’s house of worship in Jerusalem was originally built by King Solomon, but it was destroyed by the Babylonians 586 years before Jesus was born. It was rebuilt in 516 B.C., and would remain until 70 A.D. when it was ravaged once again, this time by the Roman army. Herod the Great, who ruled as the Roman “yes-man” when Jesus was born, was fixated on building cities and heathen temples all over his kingdom. In order to ingratiate himself with the Jewish elders, who were wary of his friendliness with Rome, Herod started remodeling Jerusalem’s Temple, section by section, in 20 B.C. Herod’s equally cunning son, Herod Antipas, whom Jesus called “That Fox”, finished the work in 26 B.C. Thus the rabbis belittled Jesus, as reported in John 2:20, by insisting that he could not possibly raise up in 3 days what had taken 46 years to construct.

So generation after generation practiced life in and around the synagogue as routine. Young Jesus learned this well in Nazareth, and the story goes that he demonstrated this familiarity as a twelve-

year-old on his first visit to the Temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—the Synoptic Gospels—have Jesus in Jerusalem in Jerusalem on only that occasion, as a youth, until his return at the end of his three year ministry. But John has him there often, and typically at the time of a holiday or festival.

Another difference between John and the Synoptics is even more striking: John places the incident of the “Cleansing of the Temple” early on among Jesus’s travels, while Matthew, Mark, and Luke all place it at the end. Theories abound among scholars as to the reason for this discrepancy:

1) Jesus might have challenged the money-changers twice, at both the beginning and the end of his ministry, but that is not likely, since the first would likely have warned temple leadership to look out for his possible return.

2) The Gospel of John was completed after John’s death by a trusted devotee, who would have been finishing the work from John’s notes on separate pages of papyrus. Maybe the pages were put together in a different order than John himself would have preferred.

3) Remember that John is not interested in creating a chronological biography of Jesus’s life. His prime purpose is to show that Jesus is the Son of God. John is more interested in the truth than in the facts—not fake news, now, but in the truth. He is intent on proving that, in cleansing the Temple, Jesus was only fulfilling what had been prophesied, by Malachi among others. Jesus’s action in the Temple shows that he is the fulfillment of God’s promise. The date of the incident does not matter; what matters is that it happened as foretold. By placing the account in the forefront, John is confirming that Jesus is acting the way that anyone should expect the Messiah of God to act in a house of worship gone astray!

And what was his action? Consider again the context: It was the dream of every Jew to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem, and anyone over 19 years of age had to pay a tax to the Temple. For most, the tax was the equivalent of two days wages. Pilgrims came from all over the known world—

Rome, Greece, Egypt, Palestine—possessing the currency of their economy. But the tax had to be paid in Galilean shekels, because the other currencies were considered unclean.

That's where the money changers came in. They had devised a complicated system whereby a pilgrim could be fleeced as many as two or three times moving through the sections of the Temple toward the center. And Gentiles were fleeced just as boldly, though they would not get past the first section. If any pilgrim wanted to deepen the experience by sacrificing an animal, that transaction presented yet another occasion to be cheated.

That's where Jesus came in: "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

His point was that formal worship, without reverence for the Holy, desecrates the Temple.

His point was that, as the prophets had long admonished, animal sacrifice was irrelevant.

His point was that everyone should be equally welcomed at the Temple—even Gentiles!

Empty, self-serving, deceitful, exclusive ritual has no place in the sanctuary.

Disciples take note! Following Jesus may mean dismantling the status quo!

This did not sit well with the authorities, who were undoubtedly aware of the growing popularity of this interloper: "What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?" (Jesus): "Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again!"

They didn't get it! Jesus was talking about his own body--not THEIR temple but HIS temple!

He was foretelling that his resurrection would occur three days after his crucifixion. John and the others would recall the Messiah's words as they contemplated their experiences with him after his death.

The old laws no longer apply. Jesus himself replaces them. Jesus embodies the New Law! He says this clearly numerous times in the Gospel of John: "I am the bread of life...I am the light of the world...I am the true vine...I am the way, the truth, and the life...I AM!

I am the dismantling of the status quo!

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As I began a pastorate in northern Kentucky years ago, I became aware of the racial bias inherent in the marriage license application process. The couple could check "white" or "colored", but one could not be "white" and the other "colored", not to mention that in 1973 the use of the term "colored" was no longer in vogue, and not to mention that in my own family was an Asian child who was neither "white" nor "colored"! If it were him, what box would he check!

The County Clerk told me that the language was dictated by state legislation. Fine. I took the matter to the Kentucky Council of Churches, which took the matter to the Legislature. By 1975, more than 100 years after emancipation, the application's language in Kentucky was no longer offensive.

Following Jesus may mean dismantling the status quo!

Teenagers across America are fearlessly fighting for the right to be safe at school.

Women in every industry are fighting for the right to be safe in the workplace.

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