

Third Sunday in Lent – 2024
Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:18-31
John 2:13-25

In the 1989 movie *Batman*, a two-bit thug named Jack Napier is plunged into a vat of chemicals which mutates his cell structure and gives rise to the internal monster lurking in Jack's character. Jack Napier is now The Joker. His face is radically disfigured by a bullet that passes through both cheeks. The Joker can no longer abide beauty. He vandalizes the Gotham museum. Great art – Van Gogh, Rembrandt, Cézanne, Renoir – priceless paintings and sculpture are all violated, transformed by a villain who disdains the beautiful because of his own hideousness. He remodels his own strikingly elegant girlfriend using sulfuric acid, transforming her so thoroughly that she wears a porcelain mask to hide her disturbing visage. The Joker's goal is to spread ugly.

In *The Matrix* trilogy, the computer program known as Smith, no relation, wants to take over everything. His appetite is voracious. In the Star Trek saga, the Borg, a hive-mind militant entity, is determined to assimilate everything in its path. Their mantra is simple: "Resistance is futile." It's all encroachment. Those are all examples of an unwelcome encroaching force that seeps into places it is not invited. These invasive forces rework their environment. All of these movie-making threads are fantastical, cartoonish and hyperbolic fiction. But you deal with encroachment every day. How many of y'all use Terminix? You don't like ants encroaching on your sugar bowl; you don't like cock roaches encroaching on your pantry, ear-wigs on your dresser, bed bugs on your mattress, black widows under your patio furniture (have I made you squirm?).

How about your soul? You are a temple, a holy domain – that is you. Does the world encroach on what God has made holy? Is the world a twisted up malignant conglomeration of The Joker, Smith (no relation), and the Borg? You are invited to take a hard and glorious look at Jesus cleansing the Temple. That event tells a theological story that describes His greater work, your present life, this Divine Service, and the church itself.

Jesus makes a whip. His actions are radical, bordering on violent. Why? His disciples remembered, after Jesus' death and resurrection, they remembered the event and paired it with a psalm verse: "Zeal for your house will consume me." Zeal; do you like that word? For those of you who love words, zeal is defined as "great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective." Oh, the Lord Christ is zealous. For what? A house? A structure? Does the temple being encroached on by an uninvited force stir Jesus to anger? Does it arouse His devotion to His Father? Is the Son of God determined to protect the sanctity of what takes place at the temple? Yes, yes, and yes. And there is so much more. Commerce; it doesn't belong there. The temple is not a marketplace. Merchants with an eye for profit; buyers and sellers who obfuscate the holy; Jesus is intolerant. Zeal; the Son of God is clothed in immense power and this is how He reveals His zeal.

The temple; what is it? It's the place where God's local presence dwells. It's the place where God shares His holiness. It's the place where the sacrifices are offered, sacrifices that God prescribed, sacrifices that depict grace, sacrifices that are anchored in something transcendent,

something eternal. The book of Hebrews says that the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the realities themselves (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). The temple; God had it built for a reason; Jesus is the reason. St. John writes this: "The Word became flesh and 'tabernacled' among us" (John 1:14). The tabernacle was the precursor to the temple. Jesus is the temple, the true temple. The flesh of Jesus is the presence of God with us. It's through the body of Jesus Christ that God shares His holiness with us. The Lord Christ is the sacrifice, the sacrificial body that casts the shadows in the OT; He is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

Now think; did our Lord allow anything profane to encroach on His soul? Was He sinless? Was He devoted entirely to the mission that His Father gave Him? Zealous; Did He maintain a radical allegiance to His Father? Was Jesus vigilant to sustain an impervious holiness in His conduct? This makes Him the agent of salvation. This makes Him the atoning sacrifice that you need, the atoning sacrifice that you can't live without. Jesus is the temple, the real temple. The figure of the OT temple points to Christ, who is Immanuel, God with us. The OT worship was significant because it carried within it Christ's blood, Christ's grace, Christ's death and resurrection. He would not allow anything to stain His righteousness and that's exactly the zeal that comes out when He cleansed the temple of money-changers.

That zeal would consume Him. So says Psalm 69 (Psalm 69:9). Consume Him; that's the bloody cross, isn't it? Zeal; His determination to die for the sins of the world; can you see it when you look at a crucifix? Zeal for you is what led Him to Calvary, led Him to lay down His life. Jesus has a zeal for what is holy; zeal to wash you, to wash Rowyn in His blood. Baptism has Christ's zeal in its very essence. A holy domain is what His zeal has created; a church that luxuriates in forgiveness and hope and truth and love and holiness is what His zeal has created. Rowyn is Christ's temple and He is zealous for her, to share with her all that He has done, all that He is; Jesus is zealous to defend her, zealous to protect her, shepherd her. And do you think that it's just because we're stuffy that we don't want the world to encroach on Christ's church? Do we defend mere tradition? Do we approach the holy things of God so cavalierly that we can't distinguish the holy from the common, the sacred from the profane? The Ten Commandments; are they holy to you? Do you attempt to keep them zealously? Lent is a time of in-depth self-examination. So, what has crept in? That doesn't belong in your soul, what has crept in? What has encroached on the temple that is you? Are you even attuned to the creeping profanity of the world that wants to slowly transform you into its image? Would you protest if Jesus cleared the present day money-changers who are comfortable squatters in your soul?

After Jesus displayed His zeal for the holy things of God, the Jews asked Him for a sign. "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" (John 2:18). You've got to wonder, what miracle, what sign would've been sufficient for them? What sign would've placated their unbelief and caused them to bend the knee? Remember, in His wisdom "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:27). What sign has He given? "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). That's the most glorious of signs. That sign greets you every morning and kisses you every night. The Lord's sign is His wounds. Thomas saw the signs and said: "My Lord, and My God" (John 20:28). Death and resurrection is the Lord's sign. Atonement and

Triumph over death is our Lord's sign. The sign of His glory is in His body and blood. He shares His holiness with us and we become His Temple. His zeal for your salvation consumed Him on the cross but He is raised and now that zeal is brought to your lips. Forgiven, holy, set free from sin and death – we are God's Temple and He is zealous to defend us, now and forever.