

*Sermon: Cross-eyed: Anger*  
*Text: John 2:13 – 22*  
*Date: March 15, 2009 AM*  
*Place: Jesup First UMC*

Is there anything that just really gets on your nerves? Don't we call them pet peeves? Things like: people who don't turn on their blinkers before they turn. Or fast food restaurants that just aren't fast! And sometimes, it can be the smallest thing, but it just sets you off. I was with one of my classmates this week when he asked to use the seminary's phone and we were standing there and all of a sudden, he slammed the phone down and growled. He said: "*I hate that; I just hate that!*" The secretary said: "*What?*" He said: "*I hate that message that says, 'I'm sorry but it is not necessary to dial a 1 when dialing this number.'*" He said: "*What difference does a 1 make anyway?*"

Are there things that just really made you angry? Well, in our text this morning, Jesus erupts. I mean, we've never seen Jesus like this before. We're use to the meek and mild Jesus, the compassionate, healing Jesus and all of a sudden, "boom"! It's like we don't even know this man. Where in the world did He come from? And what made Him so mad?

Well, let me start by giving some background about our text this morning. You see, liturgical space was always important to Israel. During the years of the Patriarchs, as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob moved from place to place within Palestine, they build altars and worship God at the places He revealed Himself to them. And in the wilderness, as they traveled from Egypt to the Promised Land, they worshiped God on Mount Sinai and at the Tabernacle. But in 950 BC,

Solomon built and dedicated a Temple, and the glory of God filled the Temple. God made His dwelling among the people. That first Temple stood until 586 BC when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem and burned it.

Then, a second Temple was built in about 70 years later by those who were returning from the Babylonian Exile. But this Temple was a mere shadow of the glory of Solomon's Temple. In fact, when the older folks saw the new Temple, they cried because it wasn't as good as they remembered, but ... at least it was a place of worship. Then, in 168 BC, the Second Temple was robbed and desecrated by Antiochus Epiphanies who sacrificed a pig in the Holy of Holies. Three years later, it was cleansed and rededicated by Judas Maccabaeus. And then, about 20 BC, along came Herod the Great and Herod decided to endear himself to the Jewish people by enlarging and beautifying the Temple. Herod expanded the Temple Mount and build elaborate buildings on and around the Temple Mount, making the Temple look better than it ever had.

And Israel was happy. It had a Temple, a place of worship, a place of sacrifice, a place of prayer, and a symbol of their national identity as God's chosen people. But then, one of the high priests made a terrible decision. You see, for a long time, as pilgrims came to Jerusalem to celebrate the festivals, merchants would line the streets leading up to the Temple Mount with booths. Some of the booths sold the sacrificial animals. So, instead of dragging a lamb

from home, it became easier to buy it once you got there. Some booths allowed the pilgrims to exchange their Roman money for the acceptable currency of the Temple. But under Annas, the high priest, these booths were moved from the city streets into the courts of the Temple. And not only that, the merchants often overcharged for the animals and the money-changers underpaid on the exchange of money. And guess who took a cut? The religious establishment!

Now, into this scene steps Jesus. And when He saw what was happening and heard all the noise and chaos, something snapped. He grabbed some rope and made a whip and started running around the Temple running out the merchants, overturning the booths and the tables, and yelling: ***“Get these things out of here. Don’t turn my Father’s house into a marketplace.”***

Now, what are we to make of this event? And why did Jesus get so upset?

***First, Jesus was angry because the faith was being trivialized!*** His cry was: ***“Don’t turn my Father’s house into a marketplace.”*** Now, it wasn’t necessarily the selling of animals or the exchange of money that bothered Jesus. It was the fact that the Temple – God’s house, the house of prayer, the place of worship – had been turned into a marketplace. Going to the Temple in Jerusalem was like going to the Savannah Mall at Christmas time; you couldn’t walk through the Temple Courts without being

harassed. If you wanted it, you could find it at Annas' Bazaars. But who was there to worship?

When you read this text, do you ever wonder if God gets angry with us? I mean, don't we trivialize the church from time to time? Who among us comes to church every Sunday to worship the living God? You see, the fact is: if we're like most Christians, we come to church with very mixed motives. Sometimes our hearts are in the right place, but there are those times when we come to see friends, when we come to be seen by others, when we look at worship for "what I can get out of it" instead of what I can give to it," and I wonder ... I wonder ... does God ever get mad at me ... at us?

I think He does ... when we trivialize the Church!

***Second, Jesus was angry because Gentiles were being marginalized!*** Now, to a certain extent, Israel had always had a problem with pride, with the idea of who is in and who is out, but now it was even worse. You see, there was only one place in the entire Temple Complex where Gentiles could go. It was called The Court of the Gentiles. But the Court of the Gentiles had become so filled with booths and tables that there was no room for them to draw near to God. But that was okay with the average Israelite, especially the religious leaders, because they didn't want those nasty Gentiles hanging around anyway.

I think that's so sad, because from the very beginning, Israel was suppose to reach out to all the nations of the world. Genesis 18:18 says: "*Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation; and all the*

*nations of the earth will be blessed in him.*” Even the prophet Isaiah spoke about it; he said: *“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”* But instead of being a light to the Gentiles, instead of being a blessing to all the nations, Israel was pushing the Gentiles out.

Do you ever wonder if God gets angry with us? I mean, don't we exclude people from time to time. I mean, it might not even be intentional, but oh so often we fail to fulfill God's calling upon our lives. We fail to *“Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News.”* We fail to be His *“witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the utter most parts of the world.”* We fail feed the hungry, and cloth the naked, and visit the sick and imprisoned. Oh our hearts are in the right place (most of the time), but we just never seem to get there and I wonder ... I wonder ... does God ever get mad at me ... at us?

And so, there He stood in the middle of complete chaos. Tables laying here and there, animals and people running everywhere and they asked Jesus: *“What right do you have to do this? Give us a sign to prove your authority.”* And Jesus said: *“Destroy this Temple and I will raise it up again in three days.”* Now, of course, they thought He was talking about the Temple, the building of stone and wood, but Jesus was talking about Himself, God in the flesh.

You see, this whole event, the cleansing of the Temple, can only be understood in light of the cross. Last Sunday (at the 8:30 service), I spoke about the importance of being cross-eyed, keeping our eyes on the cross. That's what Jesus did! ... Even in the Temple that day, His eyes were on the cross.

And so it is that as His disciples we are called to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him (especially during these days of Lent). For it is there and only there, that a man was crucified to pay the price for my sin – my sins of trivializing the faith and my sins of marginalizing others. In fact, every sin you and I have ever committed was nailed to the cross and we bear it no more ... if ... if we will come to Him in faith. Romans 1 tells us about the anger of God; verse 18 says: *“God shows His anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people”* but then Romans 3:25 says: *“But we are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed His blood, sacrificing His life for us.”*

And so, I wonder ... do we make God angry today or have we brought Him joy by keeping our eyes on the cross and believing that what happened there makes all the difference in the world?

Will you pray with me?

## **INVITATION**