

Worship message – 20260322 – Flip the Script

In this journey with Jesus through the gospel of John, there have been some key moments for me. One of those is the cleansing of the temple courts in the second chapter. Jesus comes to the temple, sees the money changers and the those selling sacrificial animals. He leaves, fashions a whip of cords, and returns to drive out the animals and turns over the tables of the money changers, scattering coins everywhere.

By some accounts, Jesus was upset not so much with the money changers and others, but more about what they represented – the rules of the temple or the law. It is said that he was upset that the gentiles and others were not coming to the temple to learn about the word of God. It seems to me he was upset with the barriers that prevented people from all walks of life from entering the temple to learn and hear the scripture.

He not only flipped the tables, he flipped the primacy of law and turned toward the love of God.

He does not deny the law, but he does not make it first. This was his first very public challenge to the status quo of the leaders of the temple. And a challenge to the belief that God may only be encountered in the temple, or the church, or some other sacred place.

No, his message is - we find forgiveness, encounter God, and find God dwelling among us not in any one place but in a person. We find the grace of our God again and again in a person who isn't fixed in place but is coming toward us.

Another key moment for me is Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Remember, that washing of the feet when coming into someone's home at that time was something performed by the servants of the master, not the master of the house. Jesus flips this script here also. He gets up from the table, ties a towel around his waist, and begins to wash the feet of the disciples. There is some protest from the disciples, peter saying, "Lord you will never wash my feet".

Jesus rebukes peter. For peter, the message seems clear - if I you cannot have me. Peter figuring if Jesus is going to wash his feet, how about his hands and his head! Rather bold of Peter!

Jesus also knows that his hour draws near. His washing of the feet is setting the example for the disciples, and for us, the modern-day disciples of Christ, for their work, our work, in going forth from that moment and sharing the good news.

His words, “servants are not greater than their master,” carry a double meaning: that we are both not greater than Jesus and (therefore) also not above the type of service which he shows to the disciples. It is a call for humility. A call that even in our brokenness from sin we can still serve our neighbor and serve our God. This is truly in the spirit of lent – not to serve from our perfection, but from our brokenness, not from a holier-than-thou attitude, but from the understanding that we are captive to sin and cannot free ourselves – just like those we serve.

And now we come to today’s scripture readings. Jesus has been arrested. Peter has denied Christ three times and the cock has crowed. He has been given to Pilate by the Jewish authorities, to be judged and condemned, to be punished. To be put to death. Because of the law. The law of the emperor, of the state.

Pilate is not certain about what he should do. The disciples are not certain about what they should do. But Jesus is. Is certain about what must happen. Its not to save himself, but to fulfill the prophecies to save us all. You and me. We know this from the 3rd chapter of John when Jesus and Nicodemus, a pharisee, meet and Nicodemus is asking Jesus many things.

It is probably worth reminding ourselves of who the pharisees were and were not. They were not priests. The pharisees were a prominent, influential Jewish religious and social party in Judea and were known for their strict adherence to both the written Mosaic law and oral traditions. They focused on personal piety, synagogue worship, and expanding religious law into daily life.

While they shared many beliefs that Jesus held, Jesus criticized them for hypocrisy, emphasizing outward rituals (like tithes) over inner righteousness, justice, and mercy.

Nicodemus comes to Jesus in the night, trying to understand who Jesus is and what is his authority. He acknowledges Jesus as a teacher, saying, “we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that

you do apart from the presence of God.” Yet Nicodemus struggles with the answers to his questions. His last question to Jesus is “how can these things be?”

Remember, Nicodemus is coming from the law. Jesus is coming from the unmerited grace of God. And he reminds us that God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

What follows is perhaps most important. Why did God give his only son? The answer - God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

To be saved through the grace of God. Not through ritual, not personal piety, not through our actions – but through the grace of God. One again Jesus flips the script and confronts the status quo.

Jesus confronted all of this for our sake. Jesus confronts the power of the state, of the emperor. The status quo.

And when Pilate’s allegiance to the emperor is questioned by those gathered at the judge’s bench where Pilate sits in judgement, he demonstrates that his loyalty is to imperial power, to his place of power. His response is not based in justice or the truth, but from fear of losing power and being seen as disloyal to the state, to the emperor.

It is not easy when any of us are confronted with loss of power or influence or when we have hard conversations with one another. It is not easy to speak truth to power. It is not easy when we disagree with each other. But if we can ground ourselves in our faith, a faith which is greater than any disagreement we might have, then we can trust in Jesus.

To trust in Jesus to be a community in mission for the world and entrusted with the good news that God’s grace has overcome the grave. To trust in his tenacity in enduring what he suffered for us. We are called through God’s grace to trust that he will see us through the conflicts we need to have, to trust in our faith when we are called to flip the script, and to trust that it is in this faith, in this community, that we can remain together as one. Amen