

# KING OF KINGS LUTHERAN CHURCH



**John 2:13-22**

*Do You Know Where You Are?*

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Some situations in life require special behavior. We should be quiet in the library. We should not cheer for the visiting team at Yankee Stadium. We should use the salad fork for the salad when eating at a nice restaurant. You should put your cell phone on silent when you're in church. We need to behave in an appropriate manner according to where we are.

Our text is the account of one of the two times the Gospels tell us that Jesus "cleansed the Temple." The other occurrence was during Holy Week. John's account is from the first year of Jesus' ministry. He found the behavior to be inappropriate and was compelled to take action.

The Temple was much more than just a church building. The Temple was a building that was built at the direct command of God. King Solomon built the first one. It was destroyed by the invading Babylonian army, but rebuilt — again at God's command — when the people returned from their captivity in Babylon. The Temple represented the Lord God's presence among his people. The Temple housed the Ark of the Covenant in its inmost part — *"the Holy of Holies."* On the Ark was the *"mercy seat"* where the high priest offered sacrifices to pay for the sins of the people. This building was the place God lived on earth so that people could approach him.

When Jesus arrived at this holy Temple, what did he find? In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. Because many of the Jews who came to worship had traveled from distant countries, there were merchants selling the animals needed for sacrifices. The money changers would exchange the currency of the travelers for the required Jewish currency so they could pay the Temple tax. In the shadow of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, and the Ark of the Covenant, merchants had seized the opportunity to make a few bucks.

Instead of walking up to the Temple in awe, perhaps with the words of a favorite Psalm on your lips, worshipers had to pass through the stench and noise of a livestock market. The Jewish historian Josephus notes that this "Mall of Jerusalem" was run by none other than the sons of Annas, the high priest. This house of worship had become a place of business. The people didn't realize where they were.

Jesus' reaction was quick and even violent. He didn't ask to meet with the leaders to discuss how they could change the practice. He made a whip and drove the merchants and their animals from the Temple. The honor of God was at stake. This was not a time to turn a blind eye to sin, Jesus was compelled to action, even when the action would make him very unpopular.

The response of the Jews is interesting. They didn't question his actions. Perhaps most agreed that he was right. However, they wanted to know who gave him the authority to do this. Jesus' answer showed where he got the authority and why he was so upset. He calls himself the Temple. The building represented God's dwelling on earth. Jesus, who was God dwelling on earth, said, **"Destroy this Temple and I will raise it again in three days."** This wasn't a dare; it was a prophecy. By his resurrection, Jesus would show that he was **"God from God, light from light, true God from true God."** As the Son of God, he had authority to protect the dignity of his Father's house.

This story begs us to ask ourselves the question: do we realize where we are standing? The story teaches us a much deeper lesson than enacting a rule that says *"No selling on church property."* This story asks us to examine if we are glorifying God in our lives. Do we know where we stand before God and act appropriately?

Do we realize where we are standing when we enter God's house? Does your car automatically

drive to church on Sunday morning, but your mind doesn't always make the trip? Does your car not know the way to church because you don't think your regular attendance is important? Do we let meetings become focused on the "business" of church without seeing that in his Word and Sacraments we stand in the presence of God? Personally, I am reminded not to let leading worship become a "job" that I have to perform. Mindless worship or a focus on the "business" of church not the mission of the church are no different than turning the Temple into a center of commerce. It reveals that we don't recognize where we are standing.

Do we realize where we are standing in our homes? Husbands and wives are called to love and respect each other in a way that reflects the relationship of Jesus and his holy Church. Parents are called to raise their children to fear and love their Savior. Children are called to respect and obey their parents. By faith, our homes are filled with Christ. We ought not be guided by schedules that make us too busy to spend time with loved ones; old family feuds; or bad habits that damage instead of building up our families. We must not realize where we stand if we can act like Christ isn't in our life!

At our jobs or schools or neighborhoods, do we realize where we stand? Do we glorify God to the people we meet? Do we realize that outside the doors of this building is our mission field? The lost who don't know Christ need to hear of their Savior. Does our character as seen by our friends reflect who we are because we are in Christ?

Sadly, we must all hang our heads in shame and confess that we haven't always realized where we were standing. We've acted like we don't know who we are. In our homes, church, and communities, we have acted like Jesus wasn't with us wherever we go.

But our sins and failures do not overcome Jesus. In fact, by his death he overcame our sins. He has purified us so that we can stand in the presence of God — that Holy of Holies. Both here on earth and forever in heaven, we can approach our holy

and perfect God with full confidence that he will receive us and our requests as his children. We have such confidence, even though our sins suggest that we should be terrified of God, because Jesus — God on earth, the true Temple — was destroyed. His death on the cross was the payment we couldn't render to remove our sins. Our punishment was poured out on him. But "the Temple" was rebuilt. After three days, Jesus rose from the dead to show his victory over our sin and the resulting death. We stand before God as righteous and holy because of our Savior. We fear no guilt nor even death, because he has removed sin's power.

What is the result of where we stand in Christ? Forgiveness. Comfort. Power. Strength. Service. Joy. Selflessness. Our behavior is shaped by the message that Jesus is our life. We strive to serve and honor him with every moment. We can speak boldly of his love for others. We can serve humbly as he served us. We can sing joyfully — even if our voice isn't the best — because our Savior hears what comes from our hearts and is glad to receive our praise. We can have homes of love and forgiveness. Our congregation can find strength, not in our size or where we are on budget, but in the One who leads this congregation — Jesus.

Do you know where you are? You are in Christ. His forgiveness assures you that you will remain in his care for eternity.

In our weaknesses, sometimes we forget where we, as God's people, are. We are in Christ. Sometimes we act like there's nothing very special or holy happening in our lives. But that's not true. Because of Jesus, we walk through the Temple courts every day. We stand with our Savior. And because of his forgiveness and righteousness we can be sure that we belong here. Amen.

Lent 3  
March 8, 2015

