

## **Lenten Devotional February 23, 2021**

### **Scripture**

John 2:13-22

*13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" 19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

### **Devotional**

#### **Jane Larson '17/'20**

We are a people familiar with political and social unrest. We continue to witness the pursuit of justice in new forms that join a long history of prophetic responses to oppression. For many, there is a deep desire to dismantle the racial and economic systems tearing apart our nation and our neighborhoods. Yet, it is quite controversial in the church to suggest how we ought to respond to these calls for justice.

It can feel uncomfortable to try to navigate a world of chaos and division. Afraid that we might create even more division, we sometimes cling to the familiar. When we turn to this story of Jesus overturning tables in the temple, we see that our God does not shy away from the uncomfortable or controversial.

During the season of Passover, Jesus entered the temple to find people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. In order for people to make the necessary sacrifices, there needed to be an exchange of goods. For the travelers coming from afar to celebrate in Jerusalem, they could purchase their sacrificial animals conveniently upon arrival. This might seem reasonable to us, but Jesus' reaction is to pour out all their money, turn over tables, and order those selling animals: "stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

In the Gospel of John, Jesus does not focus in on individual greed, but he seems to critique and order a dismantling of the entire system. This system of the marketplace is not necessary, and he makes no promise to rebuild it. Instead, Jesus turns the disciples' attention to his own physical body. It is not the physical temple that will be resurrected after three days—it is the person of Jesus who will continue to draw near to offer life even after death.

In this season of Lent, we practice releasing our clenched fists that cling to what is familiar. This is not an easy or passive task; it requires our constant attention to untangle ourselves from systems that seek to dehumanize and to profit off the soul of humanity.

As we engage in this work, this passage reminds us where our God may be found. God is not idly strolling through the marketplace. No, the God we follow breaks through division to bring about justice. We find our God sitting at the well with the Samaritan woman. We find our God sharing the table with those deemed outcasts by religious leaders. We find God not in the foundation of unjust systems, but in

the person of Jesus—the one who overturns tables, transgresses boundaries, and continues to draw near.

**Prayer**

God of Justice, continue to draw near to us, for we know the journey is not always convenient or comfortable. When we find ourselves in seasons of despair, give us perseverance to continue on the journey, wisdom to untangle ourselves from systems of injustice, and courage to be enactors of justice. May we seek your comfort not in the systems that are familiar, but in the one who draws near. Amen.