

THIRD in Series on COVENANT: "A **ROY G BIV** LENT" -- Yoda

John 2:13-22

St Marks UMC, Charleston, WV 3rd Sunday in Lent (March 8,) 2015

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade." ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore 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. (English Standard Version)

Near, the Passover of the Jews was, and to Jerusalem Jesus went up.

He found people selling cattle in the temple, sheep, and doves, and their tables the money changers seated at.

Of cords making a whip, of them out of the temple he drove all, both the sheep and the cattle. Of the money changers and overturned their tables he also poured out the coins.

Selling the doves, he told those who were, of here "take these things out! My father's house a marketplace stop making!"

His disciples remembered that, written, was it, consume me, "zeal for your house will."

To him the Jews then said, you show us for doing this, "what sign can, hmm?"

Jesus answered them, this temple "destroy, and in three days, raise it up, will I."

The Jews then said, been under construction for forty-six years, "this temple has, and you raise it up in three days, will, hmm?"

But speaking of the temple of his body, he was.

Raised from the dead, after he was, his disciples remembered that, said this, had he; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. Yeesssssss. (Yoda-Speak Version)

Yoda is a character from the very first Star Wars movie. I don't know if he is in the new one about to be released. (Harrison Ford is, I understand.) Yoda talks funny, yes he does.

Yoda's funny talking and funny appearance takes him out of the ordinary – calls attention to him – because he has important things to say. Yoda says things like this:

- **Judge me by my size, do you?**
- **Fear is the path to the dark side ... fear leads to anger ... anger leads to hate ... hate leads to suffering.**

- Wars not make one great.
- Calm you shall keep and carry on you must. Hmmm.
- If no mistake you have made, losing you are. A different game you should play.
- When you look at the dark side, careful you must be ... for the dark side looks back.
- [and my favorite:] Do. Or do not. There is no “try.”

You see, Yoda’s wisdom cuts through **the chaff, conundrum, and adornments** of much of our living. Yoda gets down to the basics. And we ten toed, ten fingered tall people need to be reminded of the basics sometimes.

Please do NOT hear me, at any point today, equate Jesus and Yoda. But a comparison of styles and points, make I. Yesssss.

In today’s Gospel lesson, we too see Jesus getting their attention, and calling people back to the basics.

What WORSHIP OF GOD is about is GOOD. What it had become in Jesus’ day was too much piling on of **the chaff, conundrum, and adornments** and had lost touch with the basics.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus accompanied his actions with the whip with the saying, **“Don’t make my father’s house a place of business.”** In the other three Gospel recordations of this event, Jesus said: **“My house shall be a house of prayer.”** (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46.)

The WORSHIP OF GOD is about is GOOD. PRAYER is good. What they had piled onto this took it far away from it’s intended purpose.

Yes, you and I were taught, they had taken the practice of sacrifice and turned it into something of a business. **BUT WAIT! I TELL YOU: WAIT! Why the sacrifice?**

What are we told about that?

- Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Psalm 40:6
- “Hear, O my people, and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. ⁸Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. ⁹I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. ¹⁰For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine. ¹²“If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine. ¹³Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?
¹⁴Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, ²³Those who bring thanksgiving as their sacrifice honor me; to those who go the right way. I will show the salvation of God.” (Psalm 50:7-14a, 23)
- ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. ¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God. is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalm 51:15-17)
- What to me is the multitude of your **sacrifices**? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (Isaiah 1:11)
- But this is the one to whom I will look, to the humble and contrite in spirit, who trembles at my word. ³Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever presents a grain offering, like one who offers swine’s blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol. (Isaiah 66:2b-3a)
- ²¹I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:21-22, 24)
- Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ (Matthew 9:13 and repeated in 12:7)
- ‘he is one, and besides him there is no other’; ³³and ‘to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,’ and ³³ ‘to love one’s neighbor as oneself,’ —this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.” (Mark 12:32b-33)

Back when all of the other tribes of the area were practicing human, and later animal, sacrifices, we see that Judaism built up the same kind of ritual. The Aztecs in America did it

for long years, as well, thinking that it would satisfy, would appease the angry gods they worshipped.

Jewish Psalms and Prophets, as I just shared, knew that this was not what worship of the One God was supposed to be about. But it was hard to overcome it. It had grown into such a big business that surely it must be at the heart of religion.

Later – in 70 AD (as Jesus alluded to in today’s Gospel) – the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans. And, suddenly, the Jews then began to realize – as Jesus was trying to get them to realize in today’s Gospel – that the basics of their religion, of their worship of God had nothing to do with sacrifices of blood to appease an angry god.

So often – it’s hard to see how we get carried away in the “add-ons” that we lose track of the basics.

Lent is a time for house cleaning – to strip away the extra stuff in our lives – some of which has become so commonplace that we think that IT IS THE IMPORTANT STUFF.

I’m reading an interesting book now, entitled *Benediction*, by Kent Haruf. It’s the story of a crusty 76 year old hardware store owner in Holt, Colorado, whose language is as salty as his personality. “Dad Lewis” (as everyone calls him) is dying of cancer and he’s dealing with the issues that come at the end of life. One day, he asks his wife Mary and daughter Lorraine to drive him around to some of his favorite places – so he can drink them in and to say good-bye to these places. When they pull up in front of his hardware store, he looks inside and sees an ordinary hardware store business transaction taking place. He begins to cry. Later, in a special place out in the country, he tried to explain to his daughter and wife what that crying was about. “It was nothing,” he said. But they all knew, as Mary said, “No, it was everything.”

It was the stuff of his life – the ordinary, everyday stuff of life, in which meaning is discovered and tripped over, relationships formed and broken, sinfulness is lived out in the midst of mercy, grace, and forgiveness – because it’s real. (Those are my descriptions, not Dad Lewis’.)

It's the basics of life that are so very important. And we so often overlook them – trying to deal with all of the “stuff” that we overlay upon the basics.

I had a sudden epiphany recently in a simple one on one conversation with someone talking to me about travel to far away places. Far away, exotic places. I began to think of some of the wonderful places to which I have been graced to travel. And in that moment I suddenly realized a large part of what made those places so wonderful, so exquisite: I PAID ATTENTION TO THEM; I TOOK PICTURES; I ALLOWED GOD TO SHINE BEAUTY THROUGH THEM.

And yet – in the end – if I am not taken by sudden or unexpected death – if I am given the grace of Dad Lewis to look back upon the important stuff of my life – it will be the stuff right here.

You people. This town.

The places and people who make up my life. And IF I PAID AS MUCH ATTENTION TO THE STUFF RIGHT HERE IN FRONT OF MY FACE – taking pictures, describing my daily life with the rapture of an author or poet – it would be every bit as beautiful as those “other places.”

We have what we need.

In the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says: “Know what is in front of your face and that which is hidden from you will be revealed unto you.”

Jesus went into the Temple and was upset because the basics – a house of prayer – had been overshadowed by so very much stuff, that the “other stuff” was mistaken for what was important.

MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU.

What is the Force?

WHAT IS IMPORTANT? What's at the heart of our Christianity, that Jesus came to reveal?

- It is love.
- It is Acceptance of who we are by the God Who made us in God's very own image and said, "This is Good!"
- It is the love of God, through Jesus, which nothing in all of creation can ever separate us.
- It is Mercy; it is Justice like a mighty flowing stream
- AND it is ALL gift.

Lent is a time for cleaning house. **What do we need to tear out of its comfortable place that captures our attention and misdirects us from what God wants us to RECEIVE?**

To look into the mirror to ask that question, I invite you. Hmmmmmm.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.