

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our crucified and risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you ever walked into a room or opened a closet and thought, “Wow... we’ve really let this get out of hand”? (SLIDE) In my case it’s the garage. We used to be able to park our Honda Odyssey in that garage, but now I have trouble fitting in yet another package from Amazon. Those packages from Amazon just keep coming... Maybe at your house it’s the kitchen or Dining Room Table that tends to get cluttered. In our kitchen the place where I sit seems to be the catch-all for everything PJ doesn’t know where it belongs. I’d put that tool away, but the garage is already overflowing with other stuff. Every so often, if you’re like me, you look at the mess and say, “This is not what this room is *for*.” Then comes the day of reckoning when you roll up your sleeves, grab a trash bag (or the entire box of trash bags), and start clearing, sorting, tossing. It’s not pretty. It almost always gets messier before it gets better, but underneath all the clutter, there’s still a good table, or a garage where you can actually park a car, all waiting to be reclaimed for its real purpose. It happens here at Church too. As I was editing my sermon and prepping for today, Dean called to say he had gotten up at 5 am, came to the Church about 8 am and with Bev and Eldon’s help, they reclaimed a good portion of our Fellowship Hall downstairs in preparation for the Funeral service later this week. Even the Church needs a good deep cleaning from time to time...

As we pick up the story in John's Gospel today, Jesus had just revealed his glory by turning water into wine at a wedding in the town of Cana. Now, the very next thing Jesus does is go to attend the Passover festival in Jerusalem, which is packed for the festival. (SLIDE) The temple sacrificial system is the beating heart of Israel's worship. It's the place where heaven and earth were thought to meet. As pilgrims came from all over the world, they need to exchange their Roman coins for Hebrew coins that don't contain the graven images of Caesar. They also need animals for their sin sacrifice. Over time these necessary things inched, imperceptibly closer and closer to the center. What started out as something helpful, has quietly taken over the house. Jesus walks into the temple courts and instead of prayer, he hears sales pitches. Instead of hearing people lifting their prayers in wonder at the mighty acts of God, he hears animals, haggling, clinking coins. The place that was meant to be a sign of God's presence looks more like a noisy marketplace. (SLIDE) When Jesus sees what's happening, He makes a whip of cords and drives the animals out. He spills the coins. He overturns tables. He tells the dove sellers, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Then John gives us the line that unlocks the whole scene, "Zeal for your house will consume me." In John's Gospel, this isn't just Jesus having a bad day. This is a sign of who he is. He cares so deeply about his Father's house, about real worship, about people meeting God, it literally

consumes him. Rather than this being the last straw before the religious leaders plot to kill him, as it is in the synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Markk, and Luke, in John's Gospel, this scene sets the stage for the rest of Jesus' earthly ministry. Zeal for God's house will eventually drive him all the way to the cross.

The religious leaders, understandably, want to know what gives him the right to come into their Temple and start flipping the tables. They ask Jesus who do you think you are, barging in here and rearranging everything?" (SLIDE) Jesus answers with the strangest "sign" of all, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They think he's talking about the temple, but Jesus is talking about His crucified and risen body. From now on, His Body and Blood is where sin is forgiven, and life with God is restored. Our sin clutters up the very place meant for God's people to encounter the Living God. Both the temple in Jerusalem and the temple God established within our own bodies has gotten so cluttered and compromised, Jesus had to come and clean house. The sign of his authority is not a bigger building or more of our sacrifices, but his own body given, and raised up again, for you. Even though we stopped selling sheep and doves in the narthex and thankfully, we no longer sacrifice those animals here on our altar, our Churches and our lives still get pretty cluttered and compromised... (SLIDE) Just to be clear, I'm not talking about extra pews or bolts of cloth for quilt making stored in the basement Fellowship Hall, or the mess on Pastor's desk... I'm talking about

how the church can start to look more like a “spiritual marketplace” than the body of Christ. We talk and act as if the point of it all is to “get something out of church.” Maybe we come here for a little inspiration, a bit of comfort, some nice music, maybe activities for the kids. None of that is bad in and of themselves.... Even my prayer before each worship service, “Lord please give us a little slice of Heaven,” implies we should “get something” out of Worship. It’s not bad to get something out of church, but getting something isn’t the reason you came here. Today’s scripture serves to remind us, if we’re not careful, we too can start to forget why this house exists in the first place. As important as it is for us to use this building as our tool for doing ministry, this house of God is still a house primarily for worship, for prayer and for encountering the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, serving is important, but our serving flows out of our Worship together. If we lose our focus on meeting as the Body of Christ here in this place, the church can feel less like holy ground and more like one more thing that fills our already busy schedules. Even in our personal lives with God, we can clutter up the space. Our hearts are meant to be a dwelling place for the Lord. (**SLIDE**) When God created us, He placed that image deep within our very being, the place we call our heart. It’s like a kind of little sanctuary, right inside of each of us. Somehow our schedules, anxieties, our fears and resentments, and even our good works can become distractions that fill our being and crowd out or bury the image of God

inside each and every one of us. Prayer can get squeezed into the margins. We know the desk is there, but it's covered in piles and piles of stuff.

Jesus walks into our overcrowded lives and we're a little afraid of what he might overturn. If we're honest, we all have our "tables" or desks full of things we've set up, arrangements we've gotten comfortable with, habits we'd rather not have disturbed. (SLIDE) We love Jesus the Comforter; we're not always so sure about Jesus the Table-Flipper. Nevertheless, here he comes, with that same burning Zeal for you He had for the Temple in Jerusalem. He looks at the clutter, he looks at the noise, and he says, "This is not what I created you to be..."

Sometimes that can feel like judgment — and it is. With Jesus, our judgment always comes rooted in love, not from disgust or anger over our Sin. He loves *you* too much to leave your heart this way. Here's the difference between God's righteous judgement and our human judgment. When we humans render our judgment, it usually just comes with tearing something down. When Jesus cleans house, he doesn't just tear down; he also *rebuids*. Jesus proclaims, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." (SLIDE) The people heard blasphemy and nonsense, but after the resurrection, the disciples remember and finally understand — the real temple, the real meeting place between God and humanity, is not marble or gold; it's flesh and blood. It's Jesus. Think about that for a moment... The same Jesus who drives out the money changers is also the Jesus

who will stretch out his hands on the cross. (**SLIDE**) The zeal that consumes him isn't just righteous anger, but rooted and tempered with God's own sacrificial love.

Jesus' zeal for you is so strong He gave his own life so you and I can have a place with God. At the cross, Jesus flips the sacrificial system on its ear. No more buying, no more selling, no more earning or bargaining. (**SLIDE**) In Christ, the traffic of grace, mercy, and love all move in only one direction, from God to you. Jesus pours out His Holy Spirit on His disciples then and now. As a result, the presence of God is no longer chained to a particular address in Jerusalem. It spreads — into living rooms, prison cells, little churches in small towns, and quiet of homes where people bow their heads and call on his name. The grace in this text is that Jesus is the One who puts his own body on the line so that nothing and no one can come between you and the Father's love.

(**SLIDE**) What if you pictured Jesus stepping into the cluttered room of your heart. There He is, sweeping out old grudges and scars from past hurts with the cleaning tools of His mercy and His Grace. Hear Him say, "This place belongs to my Father. Let's clear some space for Him to dwell. May the same Christ who cleanses the temple, cleanse our hearts with grace and mercy, fill this congregation with his living presence, and keep us rooted in the overflowing, never ending love of God in Christ Jesus. Amen.