



Wild Goose, Free Spirit – Touchpoint for February 28, 2024

John 2:13-22 (NRSVUE) Jesus Cleanses the Temple

TOUCH POINT

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, with 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.

In the temple were a series of courts. There was the court of the gentiles, and the court of the women. Deeper in the temple was the court of the Israelites, and then the court of the priests leading to the holy place. The outer court of the gentiles was where the cattle, sheep, and doves were being sold at inflated prices, to those who had come from faraway places. They were anxious to be present for the Passover feast at least once in their lifetime. It required a temple tax. The money changers changed the foreign money into temple money to pay the required temple tax. Given how many people were there, it must have sounded like a casino. Add bleating, mooing and bird poop and the court wasn’t exactly conducive to a house of prayer. All the pilgrims wanted was to be near the holy place. When Jesus arrived, he entered the court of the gentiles first. What he saw struck a cord and he was pissed!

Greetings to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.

Look at what the scriptures say about this kind of temple sacrifice after the Israelites were freed from Egypt:

Isaiah 1:11-17: “For I did not speak to your fathers, or command them on the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

Psalms 51:16: “For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offering.”

Mark 11:17: “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations.”

You think God is interested in our sacrifices?

Jesus would soon be sacrificed at the hands of people who wanted the temple politics and religion to be a marketplace. They wanted to continue the slaughter of the innocent for divine appeasement. Even now, Christian leaders accommodate people wanting to rid themselves of guilt and shame, with sacrificial acts. People desire to balance the scales of justice that weigh heavily against them. It’s like washing the judge’s car in the hope that the judge will let you go. But there is no remedy, no confession, no sin management that

make up for the human condition. But man, do we try! We must see the futility of our attempts to erase our record.

I had a wonderfully generous man in my life, who carried me during a time when I felt my image was shot. My decisions had left me emotionally and financially ruined. For a year, his grace and support was humbling. Once he said, "Henry, you have liabilities, you're not a liability." It gave me dignity. I was vulnerable and open with him. Maybe at times I was pathetically self-loathing, but other times it made me a more transparent communicator. I found people could relate to my brokenness. It validated their feelings of unworthiness to hear God loved them nakedly, without their masks of importance and from insecurities.

One day we were heading back from a speaking engagement, and I was once again thanking him for his love, grace, and financial help. He was quiet for some time as we drove. He took a deep breath and said, "Henry, I can't take it anymore. I can't continue to hear you open every area of your life to me without my reciprocation." I was shocked. He said, "You think everything I'm doing for you and do for others is pure self-sacrifice. I do love you, man. I love God and ministry. But the reason I do these things is my effort to make up for my secret life. My battle. To keep me from doing the things I don't want to do." He went on to tell me things he struggled with in his life. Things self-sacrifice cannot erase. His sacrifices could not provide cover against vulnerability and humility. God does not want sacrifice.

We, as sinners, victimize ourselves with acts of penance. It does nothing to ease our shame and guilt. Like me, when we are so preoccupied with our shame, we have no room for someone else's story of failure.

You see, Jesus got pissed off for more reasons than bird poop in the narthex. The temple was the place for people to find solace and seek discernment. The sacrifices were meant to make peace with a frightening God who would cause droughts and plagues or perhaps cause good things to happen as a reward. Jesus said, "This is my father's house and you've turned it into a marketplace!" A good father says you belong even if you don't act like it. A bad father is one who requires obedience and adulation for protection. Guilt, shame and fear are an authoritarian's dream scenario for power and profit. Kind of like a mob boss.

In the marketplace, you must pay fees for basic life answers: medical questions, mental health, spiritual and emotional care, etc. It seems the most important information is reserved for those who pay a price in the marketplace. Do our church institutions often do the same thing, only in different ways?

This Sunday, the Community of the Wild Goose will be meeting after a very long break. The community of the *Wild Goose that stretches throughout the globe is full of the disillusioned! Addicts, alcoholics, people like my friend, pastors, priests who have been defrocked or re-frocked, parishioners who have been sexual victims, even perpetrators. Rich folk who lost their reputations. Poor folk who live invisibly in homes right outside church property, but are catered to, when the bishop comes. The over- and under-responsible, the shy, the doubters, the atheists and agnostics, all people who desire authenticity.

Everyone wants their churches to be inter-generational and multi-ethnic. In the community of the Wild Goose, a marketing plan is not needed to achieve diversity. We simply invite the people mentioned and it will happen. It's all of us. It crosses generational and ethnic boundaries.

Does it sound like I'm cynical about the American church? I'm not. I'm beyond cynical. I don't have time for cynicism. All I know is the Wild Goose followers who have met the God of their understanding, have been freed by the one who went into the outer court, swinging cords to free people from the grips of a marketed, branded and dying religion. Let my innocent animals go! Unleash the Wild Goose and follow it.

There are many who walk with the mega-herd of Christians, questioning message and practice inwardly, but not speaking. Their voice is lost in a cacophony of demands and opportunities for their family, if they will only contribute to the church budget. What if you can't afford what's being required to be a welcomed member? Perhaps financial penance will do?

Jesus was pissed about the leaders' selling animals for sacrifice, turning the court into a title loan pop-up and casino. He said, "Not in my house!," waving his Mutombo finger in the sky.

Perhaps the animals were not the focus of his anger, but rather his way of freeing them from those who caught his wrath.

The doves were singled out among the other animals. The representation of the dove being let go is stunning. The dove represents Spirit. Could Jesus have been saying, 'You can't sell peace, you can't market hope'? You cannot sell access to a God who resides in the temple, the temple which Jesus said is himself, and us.

Jesus freed the doves from the church. The Spirit is now poured out over all humankind. The temple has been turned inside out. The outer court is now where the doves fly free. The holy place is in those marginalized to the outer courts. We no longer need to make a pilgrimage and pay a temple tax. We no longer need to jump through the hoops of evangelical fundamentalism. The doves have been freed. The enslavement is an illusion.

Jesus was shooing the animals to set them free from the church itself!

Pause and think of the enslaved ones in authoritarian churches, trying to get themselves right with God through sacrifice. May we be a community that welcomes them. Whether they know it or not, they are free. Whenever a person crosses over their heart at communion, signifying their unworthiness for communion, the dove is caged. Perhaps when Jesus saw this, it struck a chord of intense disharmony. Spirit was grieved.

Perhaps the only way the dove and the wild goose will fly in the church is if the doors and windows are opened wide.

May we offer an alternative. May we open the doors and windows of our personal and institutional temples. May the cords of Jesus swing with love, *agapao* love. May it have the snap of compassion, the wind of spirit. May it bring the rain of grace to soothe the wounded. May it be embodied in the bread and juice in a new political and religious party. The new wine party poured into new wineskins and shared to all those hungry for authenticity and a full welcome! May it be for the posers, fakers and wannabes that Brennan Manning describes.

The marginalized and disallowed are the light of the world. They've discovered that the gift of grace is better than an emotional flogging. Swing those cords, Jesus, and wave that finger!

Amen

*The wild goose is the Celtic image for the Holy Spirit.

Opening Songs

Be Still

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be still, know that I am God

Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the Holy Spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

See Him

(Keith Duke)

See him... 1) Silent and lifeless 2) Alone and forlorn
3) Broken and helpless... crowned with a garland of thorns
4) As son and as brother 5) Related to all
6) Through the grief of a mother... hurting the most of all
7) As healer and teacher 8) As helper and friend
9) As prophet and preacher... Ignore Him? I doubt if you can.

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

("Our Father," Taizé Reflections)

Benediction

Gaelic Blessing/Deep Peace

(John Rutter, The Cambridge Singers)

Deep peace of the running wave to you. Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
Deep peace of the quiet earth to you. Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
Deep peace of the gentle night to you. Moon and stars pour their healing light on you.
Deep peace of Christ, of Christ the light of the world to you.
Deep peace of Christ to you.

Amen.