



## **March 4, 2018 - Prophetic Drama**

### **Given by Rev. Mattei**

*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. (John 2:15)*

Why? Worshipers counted on the animals and money changes be there so they could offer their sacrifices in love and faithfulness. Some explain that action as a rejection of the leaders' corruption: people were not just selling animals, they were cheating other people as they did with some kick back to the priests. The other three gospels help us down the road to this conclusion.

But in the gospel of John, this conflict in the temple takes on a different meaning. Jesus is not only acting against corruption. He is involved in performance art or prophetic drama. Jesus brings temple activity to a standstill in order to point to another holy place altogether. "Destroy this temple," Jesus says, "and in three days, I will raise it up." The human body, not just Jesus' body, as well as the rest of God's whole creation are sacred.

In John's Gospel we hear the fundamental message of a God who establishes the true "holy place." "The Word became flesh, and lived among us," John writes. In the incarnation, with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, God's dwelling place is with human beings, as a human being. God so loved the world to become part of this world, the Emmanuel, just as the prophets had said. The world is valuable to the Creator God. So Jesus baits the Jewish leaders: "I dare you: destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Resurrection Life is more powerful than God-less life, i.e. spiritual death.

Jesus wants to warn us in a dramatic way that we don't want to let our life become dependent on market forces. We cannot be shopping around for the cheapest and most congenial strategy (idol) to grant us security and serenity, solidarity and status, satisfaction and support. Deep down we long for love, affirmation, acceptance and belonging. All our interactions, including our conflicts, revert back to those basic human

needs. Unconsciously, we all seek ways to justify our presence in the world and the reason why others should love us or at least appreciate us. We want to send across the message that we are fundamentally good and are God's gift to the world. And we each are. In varying degrees of egocentricity we go about making our presence known, seeking at all times to find and give love, appreciation, security and contribution.

But our God is not one of the many market gods; not a god among many to pick out at the convenient time, a god to shop for and invest in according to the current and immediate need. Is the God of our Sunday worship time the same as the one of the rest of the week? Is it the same God as we pull out of the parking lot? Or do we lock God up in church when we leave? We claim to be monotheist and not polytheist. Do we hold on to the one true God at all times? Our God is God of the covenant, jealous and exclusive, requiring undivided attention and commitment; a liberating God, protective of our freedom from all forms of emotional, physical, psychological and social slavery desiring for us not to fall into the temptation of bowing to other gods or fall victims of captivating ideologies.

If our life has become a market of gods with chains and dependencies, allegiances and servitude, perhaps it's time to pay attention to what it is we are after and how we intend to achieve it. And we also need to ask ourselves if the strategies we are employing to get our goals are truly liberating or they cause us to be less than a human being in the long run.

If it is joy, love, protection, inclusion, acceptance, appreciation we are after, how are we going about achieving them? What gods are we bowing to in the hope that they deliver what they promise? When we don't have a consciously chosen system for addressing needs and conflict, we are extremely likely to unconsciously recreate whatever we have learned and internalized from the dominant surrounding cultures. We very likely operate out of default leaning on the god that demands our most fervent obedience with the promise of satisfying our need.

But Yahweh our God who has liberated us from the slavery of sin symbolized in Pharaoh's Egypt is the God who has demonstrated to be there for us with humanizing covenants since the beginning: the unilateral covenants of Noah, Abraham and Moses requesting only that we consider engaging intimate and transforming relationship with God.

The Decalogue is another element of the Divine Operating System that God offers us out of grace to consider as we build our life and learn to relate to the world God so much loved. Let us honor and worship only Yahweh the Lord our God as we go about

making choices that respect the life God has endowed us with. God incarnated into this world because God has taken this world seriously and doesn't want for any other lesser gods to spoil it and dehumanize us. Let us show up as Children of a caring God.