“Where does it hurt?” Lent 3B. March 3, 2024. Faith Episcopal Church, Poulsbo, WA. Exodus 20:1-17 [the Ten Commandments]; Psalm 19; I Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22.

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. 15Making 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. 16He told those who were selling the doves, ‘Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market-place!’ 17His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’ 18The Jews then said to him, ‘What sign can you show us for doing this?’ 19Jesus answered them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ 20The Jews then said, ‘This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?’ 21But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22After 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.

The Sermon

“Where does it hurt?” asked the doctor. Right shoulder? Left foot?
Once the hurt is identified, the doctor can begin her work.

Where does it hurt when you hear these commandments read? Where does it hurt when you hear about Jesus’ act of rage in the ancient Jerusalem temple?

Where does it hurt when you walk out of church to return to your home, to work? Where does it hurt while you are singing, praying, walking up to Holy Communion? Does Lent hurt?

Does it hurt to see Jesus so angry that he would gather cords to make a whip, that he would pour out the coins of the businessmen in the temple and overturn their tables? Here it was Passover, a busy time for those folks, just trying to earn a living and just trying to make life easier for those who came from afar to offer tithes and sacrifices. Why drive your own ox from a remote village to Jerusalem when you could buy a good, fat one here? Why look elsewhere to change your Roman coins into shekels to pay your temple

tax? The businessmen were just providing a service to the crowds coming to Jerusalem for the festival.

OR, was this something deeper? Was Jesus remembering the words of the shepherd prophet Amos, who said God HATED our festivals if the poor are oppressed and the needy crushed? (4:1, 5:21)

A local doctor friend of mine questions the term "anger management" and prefers the term "anger appreciation." Let's figure out WHY someone is angry. There are plenty of good reasons to be angry when one looks at how the poor and needy are crushed today. Zeal on their behalf can be part of what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. Jesus is realizing that Jerusalem will reject him as messenger of the Kingdom of God.

John writes of the destruction of the magnificent temple, which he has already witnessed and which Jesus foreshadows in today's story. The temple – pride of the people – has never been rebuilt. They will have to look elsewhere for a way to worship.

The destruction of the temple – and the temple of Jesus' body – will mark a <u>new</u> covenant, a new era of faith.

Indeed that body <u>was</u> destroyed and raised in three days new. Jesus offers us his newness. His death and resurrection and ascension will open worship for all, without money, without price, without animal sacrifices.

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Sometimes the doctor tries to find out where it hurts by moving your leg out of its comfort zone or pushing your abdomen a certain way, by scrutinizing you with x-ray or MRI. Perhaps that's also the task of the Ten Commandments, the task of Lent, and part of the Holy Spirit's work: figuring out where it hurts.

During Lent we are called to repent. Today's reading of the commandments and our weekly confession promote such turning around: leaving what will kill us – the forces that alienate us from God -- and embracing what will give us life – turning to our Maker.

I read a piece this week from the website of the Abbey Church in Victoria (British Columbia) entitled, not repent, but Re-lent. The writer suggests that during these 6 weeks of introspection, we might "enter a space where we …

entrust ourselves to the God who meets us in our need… To relent is to ease up, to change course, to turn, or to abandon or mitigate a harsh or cruel intention." He suggests we see Lent as "a time of rest and freedom … [and] turn our gaze back to our Maker! There is much repentance in that, yes, but it's less about self-flagellation and more about relenting our endless efforts to live as though God does not exist.

"So put away the hair shirts," the writer goes on, "and feel the delicate warmth of a prayer shawl being draped over your tired shoulders. Open your dry cracked hands to allow palms up to receive the Rest your maker longs to give you. And know you are not alone in the wilderness."

Another writer suggests giving up "self-neglect" for Lent and committing each day to "healthier eating, more yoga, meditation, better time management…." [1]

Lent means many things – but paying attention to the brokenness of the world and where we find that brokenness in ourselves is an important piece. Jesus saw the temple markets as a part of the brokenness of *his* spiritual world that week. And the righteous rage of that story has not been forgotten.

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When Jesus' followers gathered after Easter, they formed communities of sharing and prayer. They remembered that Jesus was about mercy, not sacrifice, about life, not destruction and death, about divine things not human things. They came to understand how Jesus' crucifixion offended those who rely on the wisdom and power of the world. Jesus' death was a message of foolishness and weakness which became wiser and more powerful than any human wisdom or strength.

They remembered Jesus by eating bread and drinking wine when they gathered, knowing that Jesus would indeed be among them. He would offer strength for the journey. They fed and sheltered the widows and fatherless and strangers in the land.

Through the centuries this remembering has reached us in our little corner of the Pacific Northwest. Do we still have a spark of revolutionary zeal like Jesus did that fateful Passover week? Perhaps we glimpse – even in the

[1] Chanequa Walker-Barnes quoted by Molly Worthen in "What We Give Up Makes Us Who We Are," in New York Times, Feb. 18, 2024.

midst of worship that can seem routine sometimes – perhaps we glimpse the Lord Jesus with his zeal for justice and his heart for mercy. Perhaps we are touched by both the comfort of his forgiving words and the encouragement to help and befriend our neighbors in all their needs.

Jesus enables us to turn our zeal for his house into a hot shower and lunch each Monday. If you would like to channel YOUR zeal for God's house, ask me about the property, finance, clerical and website needs of our church.

When the doctor figures out where it hurts, she seeks to heal. If God's commandments and expectations poke and prod us, prick our consciences, drive us steadfastly to our knees, let us also hear the words of Jesus' forgiveness, the blessed assurance of the Lord's table. Those words lift us up from our knees and propel us healed and whole into the world of the suffering neighbor. Our great Physician provides us with the medicine, the energy and the rest we need to continue the revolutionary Christ-work: the work of the one who dies and rises anew in this community.

When you hurt, may you be graced with rest and life abundant, through Christ our Lord. Amen.