

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus is at the beginning of His three-year ministry in our Gospel text. He had just performed His first miracle at the wedding at Cana, turning water into wine (Jn 2:1-12). But the Passover festival was nearing, and having been trained up by His parents (Lk 2:41-42), Jesus would make His way to Jerusalem for the festival. Where He celebrated this Passover meal and with whom, we don't know. The Evangelist doesn't say.

Of course, Jesus would go right away to the temple — this was Herod's temple. The temple was the center of the religious life for God's people. It was there that the Passover lambs would be sacrificed, their blood spilt upon the altar of the Lord. When Jesus went to His third Passover, He Himself would take up the role of the Passover lamb (1 Cor. 5:7), sacrificed for the sin of the world (Jn 1:29), but not this time. This time Jesus foretells what lay ahead of Him using a different picture of the significance of His death and resurrection. This time Jesus is the temple.

Jesus went to the temple as He entered into Jerusalem, and there He found people selling oxen and sheep and doves along with the moneychangers. Unhappy with this desecration of the temple courts, Jesus fashioned a whip out of cords and drove them out, spilling the coins by turning over the tables, such was His zeal for His Father's house. This cleansing surely caught the Jews by surprise. All they could muster in defiance was an indignant, "Who do you think you are to do such a thing?" But Jesus would do it again at that third Passover week, and that time the chief priests and the scribes would be ready. That time, they would say nothing to Him, but instead would plot "*a way to destroy him*" (Mk 11:18).

Why was Jesus so unhappy? Because this was God's house. It was a holy place, a sacred space. It was a place where God came down from heaven to meet the people. The temple, and the tabernacle before it, identified the locatedness of God for them. "Locatedness" is not a word you'll find except in the domain of mathematics, but you get the picture. This was where God came to be for the people.

To be sure, God is everywhere, as the Psalmist sings. Wondering where he might go to flee from God, he sings: "*If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me*" (Ps 139:8-10).

But the temple was where the Lord could be found for the people. Here was the mercy seat of God. Here the people were to come to offer up their sacrifices to the Lord: sin offerings and guilt offerings, burnt offerings and peace offerings. Here

was where sins were atoned for and the people were made right with the Lord. Here was the Father's house — the dwelling place of God. *"How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts,"* the Psalmist sings (Ps 84:1). Yet, the people had made it into *"a house of trade."*

*"What sign do you show us for doing these things?"* the Jews asked Jesus. His zealous fulfillment of Psalm 69 was not enough. *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* The Jews thought Jesus was talking about the temple structure, but *"the greater and more perfect tent"* was now found in Jesus' flesh (Heb 9:11). Jesus was beginning to point them away from a building for this locatedness of God to Himself, for He is the Immanuel, the God with us (Mt 1:23). He is the Word — the eternal God — who became flesh and tented among us. *"We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth"* (Jn 1:14). Jesus' body was now the holy sanctuary of God.

Neither the Jews nor His disciples understood what Jesus was talking about when He made this prediction. It didn't matter. The Jews would do exactly as Jesus foretold, exactly as they later plotted. They would destroy this Temple, lifting Him up onto a cross, a perfect sacrifice for sin, His blood securing for us an eternal redemption (Heb. 9:12). The blood of this Passover lamb now marks us; though we die, yet shall we live; and in truth, we never really die (Jn 11:25-26), for death has become for us the gate of life immortal; for Jesus lives! The victory's won (LSB490:5).

Jesus' disciples didn't understand at first, either, but Jesus would raise that temple back up in three days. He would rise triumphant from the grave and show Himself to His disciples. And only then would they put it all together, that Jesus *"was speaking about the temple of his body."* Only then did they truly believe.

Oh what folly, thought Jesus' accusers as they twisted His words and used them against Him. Oh what folly, they thought as they mocked Him hanging in weakness on the cross: *"You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross"* (Mt 27:40). And it would have been folly, and our preaching worthless, had Christ not done exactly what He said — raise the temple of His body back up in three days. But He has, and so Christ's resurrection now looses the preaching of the cross. By Christ's resurrection, the folly of the cross has been made wiser than men; the weakness of God has been made stronger than men. And we, "sinners, ruined by the fall" can "come to Calv'ry's holy mountain" and find "a pure and healing fountain" flowing from our Savior's side, opened when He died (LSB435:1).

For where is the locatedness of God for us now. The answer is the same! It is in Christ, in His body, the temple of which we have been made a part. It's in the

Church. In the New Testament, we can think of these things synonymously. By baptism, St. Paul teaches, we are incorporated into Christ, made members of His body (1 Cor 12:12-13), which is the Church (Col 1:18). *“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?”* he writes (1 Cor 6:15). Baptized into Christ, as Elizabeth Jane was today, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who comes to reside in us, and our bodies become God’s temple. Again, *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?”* St. Paul writes (1 Cor. 6:15).

Or again, the writer to the Hebrews says, *“we are [God’s] house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.”* St. Paul says similarly about us who are in Christ: we are *“members of the household of God — the Father’s house, if you will, beneficiaries of our Savior’s zeal to save and cleanse from unrighteousness. We are the Church, built on the Rock (LSB645:1), “Christ Jesus himself ... the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit”* (Eph 2:29-22).

This locatedness of God, on the other hand, could be hard to pinpoint, for the Church being made up of believers is hidden from our eyes — it’s sometimes called invisible. And there are so many “churches.” Where shall we go to look for God for us? Look for the Church’s outward marks. There is where the Church is; there is where Jesus presents Himself. And these marks, we confess, are the Word of God preached purely, pointing us to Christ the crucified and risen for sinners, and the Sacraments administered rightly: baptism, a rich and full washing away of sins, and the Lord’s Supper, Christ’s body and blood given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

There, in that place, we know God gathers believers, and there, *“where two or three are gathered in [His] name”* (Matt. 18:20), Christ is present among them. May the Lord preserve these marks among us that we may say, *“Surely the LORD is in this place ... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven”* (Gen 28:16-17). And may He grow us ever more into a holy temple as we look to the Temple destroyed and raised up for us.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.