

3 3 24 Third Sunday of Lent Temper, Temper John 2:13-22

Today in our meeting for restorative justice with 3 Stories Consulting we are going to be talking about overt and covert messages, and overt and covert values here at First Mennonite Church. Deb and Leslie, our facilitators, have been very intentional about building up to this conversation. We began with the exercise of simply identifying where we are along the journey of the last months – identifying our feelings and thoughts about sitting on the sidelines, confusion, absence of our pastor and compassion for those who were and are hurting, which, quite frankly, includes all of us. Our process includes practicing the art of listening and wondering, navigating conflicting emotions (even emotions within ourselves) and daring to put words to our hopes for the future. Last week we came up with group guidelines for being respectful of each other as we move into the deeper waters of our conversations, seeking to understand ourselves and areas in which we can mature as the people of God.

During this season of Lent, we are following Jesus and his disciples on a journey. They started out slowly, witnessing the healing works of Jesus, his baptism and hearing his thoughtful teachings. Then the parables started coming with their obscure messages and upside down conclusions. (the first will be last? What? The prodigal is welcomed home? Really?) The journey continues with challenges from the powers and principalities of the times – the scribes, pharisees, and rabbis – seeking to trip up Jesus in one way or the other. Each week seemed to bring another complicating factor, even to the extreme of Jesus raising his friend, Lazarus from the dead. The faith of the disciples had to mature, or they would have fallen away. They had to work harder to stay with Jesus even if they didn't always fully appreciate what was happening in the moment.

The gospel of John describes this scene of Jesus in the temple toward the end of his 3 year journey with the disciples rather than earlier on as the other gospels do. John places this moment of confrontation, anger, temper and volatility toward the culmination of what the disciples are learning about themselves, about Jesus and about God. In this moment, Jesus enters the temple as a devout Jew, arriving as all Jews were from the surrounding regions for the Passover. Jesus came to worship. What he encountered was a marketplace.

Do you know what an emotional trigger is? It is an event, person, smell, sound or experience that is a catalyst for an intense reaction. A simple example might be the smell of fresh bread that triggers a positive emotion of being in France. A more complex example would be adult children of alcoholics for whom the sound of a cork popping can be a trigger that sends them back emotionally to a traumatic time of living with an impaired parent.

The scripture says that Jesus had a “zeal for his Father’s house.” He was passionate about worship, study of the Torah, learning and teaching. So seeing moneychangers gouging worshipers for the purchase of animals to sacrifice as an act of devotion was a BIG TRIGGER for Jesus. He reacted. He was not thoughtful, he was volatile. He did not pick this as a teaching moment, it was an upheaval moment. His voice raised and the tables went over, all very unexpectedly. The disciples had not seen this before. They knew him to be one who would bring a new perspective on things, but not like this. His actions disrupted the status quo, it disrupted the flow of their journey together, and it disrupted the trajectory of the future they had envisioned.

That’s what happens when Jesus shows up. There is disruption. You’ve probably heard the saying, “if you want to make God laugh, tell God what your

plans are!” Something about the Divine Presence is disruptive and unsettling. We are thrown off our planned journeys, and our visions of the future are jumbled. So why would we ever want Jesus to show up? It would certainly be a lot smoother going if he didn’t! Still, whether or not we call upon Jesus to be present with us, he shows up, and there’s a fruitbasket turnover.

I have every confidence that Jesus is going to show up at our restorative session after church today. I anticipate that in the midst of our discussions there will be a holy disruption that will skew our assumptions, shake us up, and send us in a new direction. We are talking today about overt and covert messages. One of the examples I have been using about the difference between the two is regarding the children in the church. Across the board, our overt/obvious/public message is that we value and cherish our children very dearly, and we want for them the kind of spiritual formation that will abide with them through all their years. The possible covert/unspoken/hidden message is – *oh! Don’t ask **me** to lead a Sunday school class! or No, I couldn’t possibly go to camp with the kids.* These are not easy things to think or say out loud, because it can be disruptive. So we keep the uncomfortable things hidden and end up avoiding phone calls or emails, or just not showing up ourselves.

Another way to look at these messages is this: an overt message in our congregation is that we value good music and the ability to sing in four part harmony. We take pride in our musical abilities, which is great and God is praised! The possible covert message that goes with that is the unspoken assumption that if you don’t like singing, you’re not going to fit in. Hearing this possible covert message out loud is disturbing, I know! It turns over our tables and hits our ears like shouting.

So what is the purpose of this disruption, shouting, revealing of covert messages and discomfort? At the temple, the disrupter, Jesus, gives us the answer. Jesus provides the larger context – the meta narrative – of the journey. The culmination of our journeys as disciples is through to the other side of the healing, the teaching, the parables, the wilderness, the disruptions, and even the crucifixion. The culmination of our journey together as a community is the resurrection. New life ahead that will take on a different form than we can imagine now. The event at the temple reframed the question for the disciples – it pushed them to consider not what was happening in the moment, but what the moment means. Jesus didn't literally intend to pull down the Temple, but he wanted the people to know that God does not just live in the Temple behind the curtain in the holy of holies. God has chosen a dwelling place with us/ within us. This is the bigger message that will bring new life.

In our church community, (like ALL church communities, I promise) we have overt and covert messages. It is through the revealing of these messages that we will learn what the bigger message is that will bring new life. So, heads up! Jesus is going to show up here, in this place, to reveal a Divine truth that is larger than we can imagine. And that Divine Truth will pave the pathway of the rest of our journey into God's future.

Amen.

John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 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.

He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"

But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.