

***“The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”***

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

It was the strangest thing he had ever seen. Before him sat row upon row of people, all sitting quietly, watching the activity before them with rapt attention. While they all seemed to be well aware of what was happening, they appeared to be passive participants in all that was taking place around them. He had seen this sort of thing before, but never in a place like this. Where was he? Was he at a concert hall, listening to the stirring sound of a Beethoven symphony played by the Berlin Philharmonic? Was he enjoying a ballet or an opera? Was he in a courtroom, listening to the riveting testimony of a witness in a major legal case? Maybe we assume that these people were in church or at a lecture at a university. No, this man was at a hockey game!

Now, I am sure that you realize it doesn't happen like that. Hockey fans may not all react the same way, but they do tend to cheer and get involved in the game. In fact, the way many fans react when their team scores, you would think that they were the ones who scored that goal! If you are at a symphony concert, people may be quiet, but you can tell when they are moved by the music. The same response may be seen at a Taylor Swift concert, but the reactions are far different. We expect people to behave in a certain way if they are at a ball game or hockey game, and another way if they are in the library, sitting in a courtroom or classroom, or at a chess tournament. Certain situations call for certain types of action and response from us. Different situations bring forth different emotions from us.

Jesus found great joy being in the temple, what He refers to as ***“my Father’s house”***. Jesus shows the truth of the words of David, who said in a psalm, ***O Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.*** (Psalm 26:8 - ESV) Jesus is true God and is always one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is greater than the temple, and His very presence fills the temple with an unseen glory, glory like that which filled the tabernacle in the days of the Exodus, or on the day of the dedication of the temple, when we are told: ***“And when the priests came out of the Holy Place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.”*** (1 Kings 8:10-11, ESV) But Jesus is also true man, and He comes to the temple with all of God's people to be in the presence of that glory, to rejoice in the love and mercy of God for His people.

It is that attitude of rejoicing as we gather in worship that I would like us to focus on today. We tend to look at this account of the cleansing of the temple and focus either on Jesus' response of righteous wrath and indignation, or we focus on the word, “zeal”. Jesus responds as He does because the joy that should come from being in the house of the Lord has been replaced by a crass commercialism and legalism. People who came from all over the known world to worship at the temple and to offer their sacrifices, including their sacrifices for sin. Many would need to buy animals for the sacrifices, since it was not always possible or practical to bring them from home, and so a large business sprang up, supplying those animals on sight. The temple had its own currency, and just as we would buy euros or American dollars when we travel, so the visitors would need to have their money exchanged for the temple currency. The issue was not that people were offering animals for sale, or that there were the currency exchanges. It was where business was being done. They should not have been conducting business in the temple itself, not even in the outer courtyard, the only place where Gentiles were allowed to come and pray. We could also spend time talking about the ethics of many of these merchants. Let's just remember what Jesus says: ***“Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.”***

Behind it all is what God wants us to find in our worship and in being in His house and gathering together as His people. In the Old Testament lesson today, we heard the commandments that God gave to His people. Did you notice that the two commandments that are the longest, because they included the most commentary, were the first and the third? The first says: ***“You shall have no other gods before me.*** (Exodus 20:3 - ESV) And the third commandment says: ***“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*** (Exodus 20:8 - ESV) These two commandments remind us that only the True God is to be worshipped and praised,

but God calls us into His presence so that He may minister to us, giving us the forgiveness, grace and strength that we need for our lives. In his Small Catechism, Luther reminds us what it means to keep the Sabbath day holy: *We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.* (SC, 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment) The Word that we gladly hear and learn is God's law that shows our sinfulness, but it is also the good news of the Gospel, which Paul talked about in our Epistle lesson today: ***“but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.”*** (1 Corinthians 1:23–24, ESV) This is why we rejoice to be in our Father's house! We come, knowing that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves. Thankfully, our God declares His love, grace and mercy for us in forgiving our sins. He leads us in our worship to the cross of our Saviour, who gave Himself in our place as He suffers our punishment and dies our death. He assures us through our worship of our forgiveness and of the new life we have in Christ. Finally, He comforts us in the assurance of that life we will have with Him forever, that life that is ours through the Lord who also rose again as the victor over death, hell and Satan.

There is joy in our Father's house. It is joy greater than that of watching your favourite team win a big game. There is a beauty here, seen in all our God gives to us. There is peace here, a peace that is different from being in your “happy place”, or in your favourite vacation spot. There is a glory and awe here that outshines the glory that you may see in the mountains or in any of the glories of nature. We are here with God. We are given the blessing and privilege of seeing all that God has done, is doing and will do for us. We are blessed to come before God in ways that the people of Jesus' day could not do. Those people came through the sacrifices and rituals that reminded them of how sin separated them from God. They came to the temple, but could not come before the presence of God because of their sin. In the temple itself was the Holy of Holies, the place where the ark of the covenant was kept; an area that was separated from the rest of the temple by a veil that was as thick as a man's palm. That veil, which separated God from His people, was torn in two when Jesus died on the cross. In Christ, we have a different way of worship. In Christ, we have a different approach to God. We come as forgiven children. We come as freed slaves. We come as people holy and beloved by our God.

This is the joy that we have in our Father's house. It is the joy that brings us to our Father's house! This is also why being in the place brings a different response and action from us. Jesus was glad to be in His Father's house. The Saviour who came to bring freedom to the captives is pleased to gather with them as brothers and sisters. When we come together, we gather as family in our Father's house. Every Sunday is a family reunion, time to get together and to share in the joy of our lives together as brothers and sisters through faith in Christ. Fed and nourished by our God, we show our care and concern for one another, as we share with one another our problems, our joys, our fears, so that we can build up one another and bear one another's burdens.

As much as we are blessed to gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ, it is a greater blessing to be with our Father, our Saviour and our Comforter. God has brought us into a special, close, intimate relationship with Himself. But He is still God. The joy that we have in coming here also flows from the wonder and reverence of being in God's presence. That is why our response is different in this place. There should be a sense of holy awe, like Moses at the burning bush, where the Lord spoke to him and said, ***“take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”*** (Exodus 3:5, ESV) If the cleansing of the temple shows Jesus dealing with the attitude of worldliness among people, so our gathering together should reflect a true attitude of worship. It is most appropriate that we start with a moment of silent prayer and meditation, asking God to bless us through His word this day, and that our hearts would be open to His Word of Life. If you need a guide for this, there are prayers on the front page of the hymnal. As we greet friends in this place, we should remember that others are preparing for worship, and our tones should be more respectful and subdued so that we are not distracting others. Don't misunderstand; we want to take time to visit and fellowship with one another. But remember where you are, and that there are places within this building where we can visit. Here, in the sanctuary, we need time to attune our hearts to prayer and praise. We need the quiet time with God.

With glad hearts we also join in the worship. Again, what would you think if you went to a hockey game but all the spectators simply sat quietly and watched? We participate—which is why we have liturgy and responses and why we take different positions such as standing, sitting or even kneeling. We share in David's joy, as he says: ***“I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!”***” (Psalm 122:1, ESV) This is not a place to simply come as passive observers, but as joyful participants, who rejoice in being together with their brothers and sisters in the faith.

In our Sunday School opening, we use a simple hymn that I have used and sung in Sunday School and VBS since I was a child. We sing, *“We are in God's house today. He is glad to hear us pray. Let us listen, let us sing; gladly make His praises ring.”* This is our Sunday home. It is a house of prayer, where we come to approach the Holy God of all. He speaks to us in the

hymns, in the Scripture readings, in the liturgy that we have taken from the Scriptures and in the sermon. It may not always be perfect, because both pastors and people are sinful human beings. Yet it is wonderful—it is good to be here—because God Himself is present. He is here with us to reveal His love, grace and glory. He is here to help and strengthen us. He is here to feed us. He is here to forgive us.

This is the joy that we have in our Father's house. This is the place where His glory dwells. God help us to remember that, as we worship Him here with reverent awe, appropriate to His house, and with the joy and celebration that comes from knowing His goodness toward us in Christ, our Saviour. Amen.