

Lent 3B, March 7, 2021, St. Anne's  
Exodus 20:1–17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18–25; John 2:13–22

I think God must like bodies – at least, God certainly created them in all kinds of shapes and sizes and types. And, God chose to birth love into this world in an ordinary *human body*. Now, most of the time I don't think all that much about *my* body. But, of course, this *last year* every time I go on *Zoom* I get to see an image of my middle aged, pudgy body staring back at me to remind me it doesn't look, or function, the way it once did. And it *certainly doesn't* look like the bodies of the models and actresses we see on TV and movies. Although, in truth, while I used to be much thinner, I *never* looked like a Hollywood actress. But whether or not my body does, or indeed *ever did*, meet some idealized standard - *this* is me. It's through **this** body that I experience the world, I experience God, I interact with God's creatures and creation, I do (or at least *try* to do) the ministry God calls me to do. In short, this *body*, imperfect as it is, is *my* God-given instrument for *being*. It is the way **I** experience God and God's creation.

We are now mid-way through Lent and moving ever closer to Holy Week. And Holy Week is all about a human **body**. A body anointed, a body beaten, a body on the cross, a body laid in a tomb. I think the only way we can *understand* Holy Week is to embrace the 'bodilyness', the physicality, of it. And to do that we need to embrace our own 'bodily existence'. If we try to stay in our heady confessions, or our need for 'knowledge about' rather than 'experience in' then we are going to miss the point of Holy Week. Lent invites us into a deep reflection on the role of **bodies** in faith, in theology, in **life**.

What got me thinking about this was the line in today's gospel... "But Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body." We sometimes talk about the body being a

‘temple’ – usually as a reproach that we should eat right, exercise more and so on. Which is true - of course, we *should* look after the health and well-being of our bodies, but that’s not even **remotely** what this passage is about. The story of clearing the Temple is in all four gospels. But John does something very different with it than Matthew, Mark and Luke do. In the other 3 gospels this event comes at the **end** of Jesus' ministry where it serves as a catalyst for the arrest, conviction, and crucifixion of Jesus. But **John** places it right up front. Indeed, in John's gospel this is Jesus' *first* foray into public ministry. And, in John, Jesus doesn't decry the Temple as a "den of robbers" - accusing the moneychangers of defrauding the poor - rather he says the Temple has become "a marketplace". But, that's exactly what it *had* to be to fulfill its *function*. Your average worshipper didn't, indeed *couldn't*, drag the doves or rams or whatever they needed for their sacrifice, across the countryside from their home. They *needed* to *buy* them at the Temple. The Temple simply couldn't *function* without the selling of sacrificial animals and other items the worshipers needed. So **why** would John include a story of Jesus denouncing this *basic function* of the Temple? Because John wants us to understand that the Temple is **obsolete** now that Jesus has come.

Which doesn't sound too controversial to **us**. Well, of course it is, we think. But it's hard for us to really 'get' the role of the Temple for the Jews of that day. The Temple wasn't just 'a church'. It wasn't even a really, really *important* church like say St. Peter's at the Vatican. For Jews in that time, the temple was the *only* place of worship. The Holy of Holy's was understood as God's **actual** dwelling place on earth. It was where you *went* to literally **be** in the presence of God. And John wants us to understand that now that Jesus is here, *Jesus* is the place where the Presence of God dwells among God's people. **And**, after the resurrection and ascension, God is present in the world, **not** in **any** building, but through the lives

of all the ‘little Christ’s’ – the Christians. The Temple has been **replaced** – by the presence of God in the lives of those who *follow Jesus*. In other words, *in us* and in whatever **we do**, every minute of every day. Because when Jesus’ physical bodily presence in the world, came to an end on that cross - **we** became the body of Christ. And thus, **we** became the place where the world can experience the presence of God.

Which, for me raises the question of how each of us is *embodying* this role of being the ‘temple of God’ in the world. Not in how we do or don’t care for our own physical body, but in how we ‘embody’ *God* to the world around us.

So, I invite you to think for a moment about what you normally do with your time. There are 168 hours in every week, and I invite you to think about what you do with those hours in an average week. If you’re like most people you probably spend about a third of your time asleep and a large chunk of the time when you’re awake either at home or school or work doing all the various things needed to keep your life going. Maybe you volunteer a few hours with the church or some other organization. You might spend some looking after family members or talking with friends. Hopefully, you spend at least one of those hours coming to worship. What you do with those 168 hours is determined, in part, by the circumstances of *your* particular life. So, how many of those 168 hours do you think is involved in doing ‘ministry’? How much of it is spent intentionally doing the work of God? I suspect, regardless of *how you* spend your 168 hours, you probably *don’t* think of most of that time you spend at home, school, work, etc. - as being ‘ministry’.

If *you* have a hard time seeing what you do in your daily life as service to God, then you are *certainly* not alone. Even people who regularly attend worship

services, often have a hard time consciously *naming* how their faith is lived out in any meaningful way in what they do in their day-to-day life. Or thinking of *everything* they do as part of their faith response. In our current culture, even long before the start of the pandemic, fewer and fewer people even considered attending church. And more and more people who *used* to attend are dropping away. I think, in part at least, that's because for most people their faith impacts their daily lives on such a **superficial** level that it's hard to justify giving one hour a week to something that hardly seems to affect the other *167* hours of the week.

Without even being aware of it, we can fall into the trap of thinking that church and faith is somehow separate from the rest of our 'real lives'. But, in reality, church is the *training ground* for our mission and ministry in the world. Church is the way-station to find inspiration and connection to others who are also following the way of Jesus, before going back to our **main** God-given mission of living out God's love *in our daily life*. God is present in your life and actions **24** hours of **every** day whether that time is spent washing dishes, or working at a desk, or shopping for food, or caring for the needs of someone or taking care of the body God gave you by eating right and sleeping enough. **Everything** we do, or don't do, how we act towards others, everything we *say* and **how** we say it, whether we are forgiving or judgemental, grumpy or cheerful... **all of it** is part of how *we* embody, or fail to embody, God's love in this world. I think John put this story in his Gospel to remind us that we *need* to nurture the confidence that God **is** in all the mundane daily details of our life, and that *through* what we do, or don't do, *every* hour of *every* day we are joining God in this venture to bless, save and love the world.

So, over the next week I invite you to be more *intentional* about seeing how **you** are expressing *your* faith in the ordinary everyday events of *your* life. Because **you** are one tiny building block in the eternal Temple of God. The presence and activity of God couldn't be contained in the Temple of Jesus' day, and it can't be contained in *any* building or institution today. Whether your body is imperfect, aging and creaky, or still young, healthy and vital - it's through **your** body and **your** actions that God is being embodied in this world. So, let's share our journey of faith with each other and find ways to *support* one another so we *can* live our faith in a way that shows our love of God in **all** the actions of these amazing bodies that God gave us.