

“Don’t Get Distracted by the Clutter”

- Have you ever had a problem with clutter? Maybe, it’s on your kitchen table. Maybe, it’s on the counter by the sink. Maybe, it’s on your desk at work. Maybe, it’s down in your basement on your workbench. As much as many of us would like to not have one, I’m going to guess that we all have a junk drawer. We may all have boxes of stuff in our basements that you have opened up in the last 20 years.
- Are you a saver or a thrower? Are the type of person that thinks that if it doesn’t have a purpose right now, it gets tossed? Or, are you the person who will save almost anything because you never know when you might need it? Or do you sometimes find yourself thinking: *I’ll let my kids deal with it someday?*
- Have you ever been working on a project and you need a certain tool to complete it? You know it is somewhere in the house, but you spend more time looking for it than the time it will take for you to complete the project.

Yet, when you look at all that clutter that you have, it may not be junk at all. That pile on the counter may contain a thank you card you need to write; a manual for a new appliance in the kitchen; it maybe an invitation for a wedding that you need to reply to; a screw driver that you need to tighten a bracket in your garage. It’s all important. So, what is the problem with clutter? That is the problem with clutter, is it not? It distracts you from what is important. All these items on my table are important, but the one thing that is most important, enjoying dinner and conversation, is hard to do because too much stuff has gotten in the way.

At times, we can get distracted by clutter. That was what was happening in our text this morning. **“When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So, he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”**

This market place that had been set up in the temple may have started as a well-intentioned service for those who had to travel long distances in order to celebrate the various festivals at the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was meant to be a place of holiness. It was meant to be a place where God served his people and his people served God in their worship. One of those festivals were the Passover. The Passover Festival was a festival where God wanted his people to know how much he loved them when he rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. He wanted them to remember that when they put the blood on the doorposts, the angel of death would pass over that house. It was also meant to point ahead to the: **“Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”**

Yet, this was the scene before people as they were entering the temple – a livestock market and money changing operation. Historians have said, that at the time of the Passover, Jerusalem might have as many as 1-2 million people there. Many of those people came from some distances. If you had to pack up the kids and walk to Jerusalem, it was just easier to take money along with you and buy what you needed when you got there. One historian said that the people would need at least 256,500 Passover Lambs. It was supposed to be a place where people were to come and worship God. Instead, can you imagine what all was heard from a couple of hundred thousand bleating sheep, the lowing of cows, cooing of doves and the yelling of merchants? It was far from entering a quiet large cathedral. Think about how a parent feels that when their child cries during a service. It may not even be distracting anyone, but it feels like the spotlight is now shining on you. What was going on in temple, was more than distracting.

Then there were the money changers. Then there was the temple tax that needed to be paid. This temple tax was to be paid for the upkeep of the temple. And it had to be paid with Jewish coins. The problem was that since many people came from all parts of the Roman empire, their Roman coins would need to be exchanged for Jewish coins. Just think of the logistics to celebrate a festival like the Passover. Yet, Jesus doesn’t say that it was wrong to provide the worshippers

with the things that they needed for the Passover. He didn't want it to go on in the temple. **"Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"** They had become a distraction for them.

The temple in Jerusalem had a number of different areas that could be accessed by the worshippers. The outer courtyard was the "Court of the Gentiles." That was really a part of the temple that all worshippers could go. The closer that you got to the center of the Temple, the number of people who were allowed into those areas got lower. Finally, in the very center of the Temple, which was called the Most Holy Place, could only be accessed by the High Priest on one day of the year. This temple was a very visible way for God to show that he was dwelling among his people. Everything in their worship life was meant to point the people to the Messiah. It all pointed ahead to the time when God would be among all his people than just a small part of the Temple.

John writes: "Jesus answered them, **"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."** They replied, **"It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"** But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken." How would they recognize this Messiah? The Resurrection.

The Temple that Jesus was talking about was His body. The sacrifices of the temple were all wrapped up with they death and the forgiveness of sins that would bring life to all people. Jesus wants us to know that he had come into the world to bring forgiveness of sins to all people. God has come into our world and nothing, not even clutter, can stop him from loving us. Jesus comes to dwell with us in Grace, providing forgiveness to the penitent, life to the dying, strength to the weak, hope for the hopeless and rescue for the powerless. You see, that's what Jesus does for you – he gets rid of the clutter of sin and fills us with His Grace. May God grant it. Amen.