

Judgment, Salvation and the Sanctuary

Psalm 69:6-13; John 2:12-22

So the first chapter of John's gospel has been "Genesis the Sequel". John has led us through a six day sequence, each day echoing some aspect of the Genesis creation, the sixth day culminating in a wedding which fails just like the original human wedding failed in Genesis. And the sign Jesus showed us last week, the turning of water into wine, good wine, plenty of wine, was meant to teach us that Christ was a Savior who could more than make up for whatever is wrong, whatever we lack, because of sin.

And today's passage opens with what I think is a bit of pageantry, Jesus proceeds with a royal court, his mother, his brothers, and the disciples who believed in him to Capernaum, which would become his royal capital in Galilee, the place where Jesus would establish a beachhead for heaven's kingdom. And there, surrounded by his people, Jesus rested "*for a few days*" just as God took a Sabbath rest on the seventh day of the Genesis creation week. And, like in Genesis, the human story would continue with a catastrophic human failure to preserve the sanctuary God had entrusted to us.

In Genesis, Adam had allowed and tolerated a hostile, demonic intruder who subverted the human gardeners into something less than what God had called them to be. Now in John's gospel, the Gardener was Israel, and the sanctuary was the Jerusalem temple, a miniature, brick and mortar replica of the huge garden sanctuary Adam had been given to protect. And Jesus, like God in the third chapter of Genesis had come to the garden to find the place mismanaged and in disarray.

This was his third reported visit to Israel's temple, the first two visits were recorded in the second chapter of Luke's gospel. Jesus was presented to the priests as an infant and consecrated as the first born in his family, and then, at 12 years of age, he arrived there for his first Passover and disappeared for three days, interrogating the priests about the operation of what he would call his "*Father's house.*"

Here in John's gospel, Jesus again comes to the temple to observe the Passover, no longer the curious and obedient carpenter's apprentice who had first come so long ago. But now after John's six day sequel to Genesis, Jesus was like God in Genesis walking through the sanctuary garden, his "*Father's house*" and finding the priests in disobedience to the guiding principles his Father had set on how the place was to be run. The garden was given to them as a place where all humanity was meant to be welcome to worship their Creator, but Israel's priests had made the place about them.

The problem here was not that they were selling sacrificial animals and changing currency for Jews from far away who could not have possibly brought their own lambs for the Passover. The problem was that God's people had allowed a market to grow on the at porch of the temple where foreigners were meant to come and worship the one true God even though they didn't belong to the Chosen People.

To be sure, the Portico of the Nations was likely an underused, unappreciated place. After centuries of being dominated and exploited by great pagan empires, the Israelites were wounded and bitter and hardened at heart toward any foreigners who might want to stand on the porch to see something and learn something of Israel's God. But Jesus, since he shared the heart of his Father, knew that God always had and always would love lost sinners from faraway. And so the sight of animals in cages and manure and money changers doing business with the usual suspects incensed into a rampage of fury that one wouldn't expect from the unconditionally loving Savior we imagine Jesus to be.

The point being that love isn't always nice! If you love foreigners, it obligates you to be rough on the locals who stubbornly disobey God and set up for business in the only place a foreigner had to worship in that temple. Nothing wrong with making a profit selling to Jewish pilgrims what they needed to get right with God, until your greed blinds you to the fact that strangers, foreigners also need to get right with God. To be a blessing to "*all the families on earth*" was the original calling God had given Abraham some 1800 years before Jesus ran the marketeers off the temple porch in fury.

"Zeal for your house has consumed me!" Is the verse that came to mind for his disciples as they watched Jesus run the merchants off the temple porch much as God had run Adam and Eve out of the original sanctuary so long before. They saw zeal in Jesus, not offended etiquette, not some breach of propriety needing reform, but the outrage of a Son who saw his father being disrespected, the outrage of a Savior who saw the people he came to save excluded from their rightful place so that the usual suspects could practice their un disturbed by those people who needed God's help most.

The authorities responding to Jesus ignored the merits of the question, acted as if they'd never heard of a Portico for the Nation. "Who do you think you are?" they asked Jesus in so many words.

"What sign will you show us that you do these things?" Jesus responded strangely, *"Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days!"* He sounded mad to men who knew full well that Herod had spent more than four decades building the temple they had. That's right, the same Herod who had tried to murder Jesus in the cradle. But, John hastens to tell us, the temple Jesus had in mind was his own body.

Long story short. John is following here the same pattern set by Moses in Genesis. A royal wedding on the sixth day. A Sabbath rest in which the Lord of the Wedding sets up to rule his kingdom. A Fall in the sanctuary, and then a ferocious and terrible judgment. And then finally, just when you might give up hope, God offered Adam and Eve, and Jesus offers Israel a gospel. Adam and Eve are promised that “*the offspring*” of the woman will “*crush the head*” of the Serpent.

All the bad business of the Fall will be undone by a Savior. And Jesus promised Israel that even if their temple was destroyed, even if Jesus himself was slain, with “*three days*” God would provide humanity with a sanctuary, a place to be forgiven, and to know and love and worship the God who made us. And no one and nothing will be allowed to stand between us and that. Because Christ is possessed by a zeal to bring people like us to the place where forgiveness and healing and love and worship can be found.