

Sermon Notes: The Last Week

Lent 2024, Week #2

Introduction

We continue our Lenten sermon series based on the book *The Last Week* by Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, journeying day by day through Jesus' last week in Jerusalem. This week we move to Monday, the day that Jesus turns over the tables in the temple. Known as a "cleansing" of the temple, Jesus' motives and intentions have been widely explored in countless sermons and papers. This story is framed by a narrative about a fig tree, something that can help us understand Jesus' actions in the temple.

Illustration Video

<https://youtu.be/AFDYJbLVJPk?si=2ST7oFVN19Q7QHNZ>

A clip from the 1995 film *Tommy Boy* where the title character experiences a small success after a day of failure

Video Discussion Questions

1. This scene shows two salesmen in a diner after a day of failure and unfulfilled expectations. In this mindset, it is curious that Tommy (the title character) is able to change the mind of a server who seems nothing short of contemptuous. How does he do this? What is his expectation related to success or failure? What does his fellow salesman discern from this?
2. Using clear exaggeration, the writers and actors highlight the ways people can be successful and the tools necessary. In their case, this is with a goal of selling a product. Consider how you view success. Do the tools and methods for success noted in this clip parallel tools and methods you might employ toward your view of success?
3. What do you think it looks like for a person of faith to be "successful?" What do you think it looks like for a church of faith community to be "successful?" Do you think your vision of success is the same as God's vision of success? Why or why not?

Mark 11:12-21 (CEB)

¹²The next day, after leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. ¹³From far away, he noticed a fig tree in leaf, so he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing except leaves, since it wasn't the season for figs. ¹⁴So he said to it, "No one will ever again eat your fruit!" His disciples heard this.

¹⁵They came into Jerusalem. After entering the temple, he threw out those who were selling and buying there. He pushed over the tables used for currency exchange and the chairs of those who sold doves. ¹⁶He didn't allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He taught them, "Hasn't it been written, My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you've turned it into a hideout for crooks." ¹⁸The chief priests and legal experts heard this and tried to find a

way to destroy him. They regarded him as dangerous because the whole crowd was enthralled at his teaching. ¹⁹When it was evening, Jesus and his disciples went outside the city.

²⁰Early in the morning, as Jesus and his disciples were walking along, they saw the fig tree withered from the root up.

²¹Peter remembered and said to Jesus, “Rabbi, look how the fig tree you cursed has dried up.”

Scripture Discussion Questions

1. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the “synoptic” gospels because they are similar in the way they present Jesus’ life and ministry. John is different. The writer of John seems more concerned with theology than chronology. John places the narrative of Jesus going to the temple in Jerusalem and “clearing the temple” early in Jesus’ ministry; whereas, the synoptic gospels place the passage during the last week of Jesus’ earthly life. Why do you suppose the writer of John’s Gospel chose to do this?
2. In Mark 11:17, the New Revised Standard Version quotes Jesus as saying “you have made it [the Temple] a den of robbers.” The Common English Bible uses the phrase “a hideout for crooks.” Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase says, “a hangout for thieves.” Why do you think Jesus was so angry? Would Jesus turn over the tables of a Christmas mission market in your church? How about the upcoming Rummage Sale? How are these different?
3. The phrases from that same verse quote [Isaiah 56:7](#) and [Jeremiah 7:11](#). Read these passages. How do you think both word and deed concerning the Temple should inform our view of Jesus’ actions on this day?

Add'l (Optional) Questions for Consideration

1. Jesus takes strong action to cleanse the temple of distractions. What distractions keep you from worshiping God with all of your heart, soul, and mind?
2. What are some differences between Jesus’ actions and the actions of religious institutions (i.e. the church)?
3. Can you think of a time when Jesus’ actions and a religious institution’s actions got mixed up? What were the results?
4. Are Jesus’ authority and guidance ever different from the authority and guidance of religious institutions? Why do you think that happens?

Weekly Action

Prayerfully consider your life of faith and spirituality to this point in your life. Would you consider it successful? What do you think Jesus would say about how you’ve lived your life of faith and spirituality? Have you lived your life according to Jesus’ example? Paul’s letter to the Colossians says he prays “that you can live lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him in every way: by producing fruit in every good work and growing in the knowledge of God...” (Colossians 1:10 CEB). It is likely that each of us would say that there has

been some success and some... *not* success. Consider what you can do this week to be more fruitful in your spiritual life, and make a specific tangible plan to do this. Share your plan with a trusted spiritual partner. Pray for God's guidance and help!

Prayer

Holy God, in Jesus Christ you have built for us an eternal house, a temple of righteousness, a place of gracious plenty for the hungry and abundant life for the poor in spirit. Fill us with zeal for the body of Christ. Overturn the tables of corruption and greed and upset the imbalance of injustice, so that we may worship you in spirit and truth; through Jesus Christ, who is risen indeed.