

Selling Pie Pans

John 2:13-22

[walk into crowd—brainstorm about what to do with 500 found pie pans. End with trying to sell pie pans to crowd....]

What just happened? We went from brainstorming and laughing to... selling stuff here in the hale pule. We went from worshipping God to focusing on money. Stop a moment with me and ask yourself, How did that feel?

Let us pray a moment about what just happened, “God of everything, everywhere and every time, there is a time for everything, including a time for money, and a time for worship. Help us set apart this time for worship with you. Amen.”

Look for a moment of the diagram of the Temple in your Order of Worship in page _____. The outer main courtyard of the Temple was called the Court of Gentiles because gentiles could only enter there. It completely surrounded the Temple, which was organized so that each level approaching God became more and more holy, until you reached the place where no one but the High Priest could go, once a year, to offer a sacrifice for the sins of the people for that year. The center of the Temple is the Holy of Holies. The historical context of our story here in John is important. The Romans were very smart conquerors. They knew they needed to get the local leaders on their side, so the Romans made a deal with the Jewish leadership. We will help you rebuild the Temple to its former glory, they said, but you must work with us to keep the people in line. The Romans made the Priests and leaders of the Temple into their political slaves, and then did a very small of work each year, stringing the Jewish leaders along. This rebuilding would last about 100 years, from 30 BCE to 70 CE. This re-building and constant construction was a deep irritation to the Jews—it completely disrupted the normal worship life in the Temple, and was a constant reminder that they were no longer masters of their own fate. Instead they were a conquered people who had sold there souls to refurbish the Temple.

Remember a few months ago when we passed around pictures of the Roman coins? What picture was on the coins? Right—Caesar’s. The Jews considered this a graven image, and would not allow the Roman coins in the Temple inner courts. So, to be able to make any offering, Jews were forced to convert their local Roman coins into Jewish coins, which were used only in the Temple. What started out as a small enterprise turned into the entire Court of the Gentiles being covered in money changers and sacrificial animal sellers. It literally turned into a zoo. During the Passover Celebration, there are Roman estimates that 100,000 to 140,000 Jews came to Jerusalem from the surrounding country-side, so when Jesus came on Passover, the Court of the Gentiles was a real circus of merchants. You all know what it feels like when a place is overrun by tourists—especially here in Lahaina. The local Jews felt terrible—and Jesus expressed what everyone was feeling when he stepped into the Temple and reclaimed it for God during the busiest time of the year. “Stop making my father’s house a marketplace!” Jesus yelled.

During our very brief construction project here in the hale pule, I felt some of these same feelings. If I wanted to stop a moment in quiet prayer, I had to walk away rather than sit here. The construction crew was great, but they still made

noise and dust. And more importantly, they were here, but focused on something other than God. Lately we have been moving homeless people away who try to stay here because they were making a terrible mess. They were not focused on God. And so, when Jesus found merchants in the Temple who were not focused on God, but on other things, he moved them out. Let's try to imagine this conversation. Jesus says, please stop focusing on money here in the Temple. What do you think the merchants said? The priest said I could work here to change coins! My grandfather changed coins right here—this is the way we have always done this! I'm providing a service for the worshipers! I'm helping God! The excuses are timeless. The merchants were focused on money, and not on God.

Some folks criticize the church because it focuses on money too much. They are right. The church, with a big C, is far too money centric. But things are different here at Waiola. We do not have a stewardship drive like many churches do. Folks just give to help things along. We asked for a little help to rebuild this building, and you, urged on by the Spirit, responded. We didn't have a capital campaign to re-do roof. We just asked for some help, and it came. There is a model there for folks to notice. I know some churches that are experimenting with not taking offerings on Sunday. In some places that is working, in some places it is not. But again, it is not the giving that is important, it is the **attitude** of the giver. Here, Jesus teaches us that a merchant attitude does not belong here. Here, loving God is first, loving one another is second, and loving ourselves is third. Here, love is the standard, love is the center, love is the attitude. Because Jesus loved God first, merchants in the Temple just didn't work because it was not God-centered, and Jesus chased them out. I'm sure it made the authorities very angry—both the Jewish leadership and the Romans.

And our passage closes with a strange conversation with Jesus about rebuilding the Temple in three days. Standing in the rubble of a 100-year construction project, those people that heard Jesus could not understand that he was talking about a new Temple—the Temple represented by the bodies of the beloved children of God. This Temple that you and I inhabit is indeed a new Temple, a place that is sacred and God-centered. I invite you to come and listen and perhaps experience the spiritual healing of your God-centered Temple at 11 o'clock here today. Maybe, just maybe, it is time to consider how to drive the merchants of disease out of your Temple. It worked for Jesus. Maybe it can work for you. Amene.