Sermon for Sunday, March 4, 2018

Sermon Text: John 2: 13-22

# Sermon Title: "It Happened to People Like Us"

Sermon Topic: The Cleansing of the Temple & Joseph, Mariamne, Silas, & Mary of Magdala

Sermon Purpose: To teach the event and the emotions that surrounded it.

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*Sermon Prayer: Lord, open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts as we hear your word in many forms. May this message help us to understand and inspire us to serve. In Jesus name, we pray. Amen.*

**[Narrator/Reporter]**

If you were a reporter from the first century, in what they considered the **new** reckoning of time, your methods of alerting the public to newsworthy events were not as **expedient** as they are now. But, the news **still** made changes in people’s lives.

Let's go back to the times **before** television, cell phones, radio, automobiles, or even indoor plumbing. Let’s go back to the times **before** movable type, books, newspapers, or **the Internet**. We're going back to the days of Jesus and His teaching; back to when a **scribe** and the **scroll** formed an entire Information Center, to when only prophets, rabbis, and royalty had access to the Scriptures; back to a time when you had to rely on **each other** to know the events of the day – through discussion in the **marketplace**. This was a time when you **had** to be **accurate**. Mis-quoting or embellishing a statement could mean the loss of your **tongue**.

We **remember** the events of Holy Week because of the Scriptures and history. But, what about the people who lived **through** them? What about those who were present when the “hosannas” were shouted for the man from Nazareth, as he rode through the main gate into Jerusalem.

**Another** time in his life was also marked by a donkey ride. Strange, isn't it, that major events seem to have similar situations leading up to them? His miraculous birth, and all that attention, was **preceded** by a ride on a donkey by his mother – who expected his arrival at any moment. [Pause…2…3…4…5…6……7…..8….9…10]

**[At the Temple (Narrator/Reporter continues]**

**This** day was **different**! The people thought he was going to be the new King of the nation – maybe even the world! You could feel the excitement crack through the air. Conversations were hurried! No wasted time. Everyone wanted to be near him, when the tide changed from the control by Roman armies to self-government. He was one of **them**! He was to be the **Messiah**! He was to have the **power** to bring kings and kingdoms to their **knees**!

But something **happened** along the way. He stopped at the Temple, and no one was there. It was the first day of the week. It was late in the day.

Everyone thought it odd that he would stop, there, but they didn't concern themselves. He had been reported to be a **religious** man, so maybe it was in keeping with his character to go to the temple, when he entered a city.

He seemed concerned, when he found no one there. And, there was a strange look on his face when someone assured him everyone would be there, tomorrow – “business as usual."

The next day **was** "business as usual." In small villages, large towns, and even in cities like Jerusalem; the events of the previous day were **interesting** – yet, life must go on. Monday found women at their chores, children at play, men at work, skies clear and blue. It was a day like any other, until this **Jesus** went to the temple, again. It was **then** that he discovered what was meant by "business as usual."

What he found at the Temple must have made his blood **boil**! People were making a **marketplace** out of the **Temple**. There were loan sharks doling out loans at 120% interest, moneychangers were making a profit from foreigners wanting to make an offering with currency from other lands. They would exchange their foreign currency for ours, but at only **half** the value. He found sheep, pigeons, and dry goods for sale – for sacrifice and for selfish use.

It was more than he could take. He fashioned a whip from chords and started lashing out at the merchants; overturning tables of merchandise as he went.

As everyone went running out of the Temple, they heard him **scream** above the confusion: "It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer:’ but you have made it a den of robbers."

**[Joseph]**

"My name is Joseph, and I live here in Jerusalem. I want to make it clear that the people of Jerusalem are not **demons**.

This week has been most unusual. A few days ago, rumors began to circulate that Jesus of Nazareth was to come for Passover. Of **course** we had **heard** of him; who hadn't? It was said that he was the Messiah promised by the prophets. For so many centuries, we had waited for the one who was to restore our country to the greatness of King David.

I was there when we welcomed him as a hero. I threw my coat into his path. I considered myself lucky to see him.

Some conquering hero **he** turned out to be! He wouldn't even speak against **Rome**.

Today, he went into the temple and made a complete **fool** of himself. He came storming into the Temple market and began throwing the money around. He even destroyed many of the animal cages. Now, I ask you, what sort of man would want to destroy the property of his own **people**? Did he come to destroy **Romans** or his own **countrymen**?"

**[Mariamne and Silas: The Seller of Sacrifice]**

"I'm Mariamne. My husband is a goat seller and a pigeon dealer at the Temple. I'm not supposed to speak to **strangers**; especially to **men**. You know **women** aren't supposed to **speak out**. … But this is **serious!**

Where does this Jesus get the authority to make such **changes** in our way of life? The men are **very angry!** Buying and selling has been part of the Temple life for as long as anyone can **remember**. It's like telling us we should not celebrate Passover, or eat fish and bread. It's **ridiculous!**

Uh, oh - here comes my husband. Leave me, quickly, and don't speak to me."

[Silas speaks]

“I just **knew** you would want to talk to me. After all, I **am** the best-known sacrifice seller at the Temple; one of the most important people there (next to the priests and the Pharisees). With all that has happened, I expected **more** people to be here to get my story.

“My name is Silas. I come from the section of the city known as Bethesda.

This revolutionary is getting to be a problem. I mean, we've had them **before**, but **never** have they done what **he** did!

I only know who he **claims** to be: the Son of **God**, the **Messiah**! At least, that's what everyone is **saying**. Can you imagine? If that were true, then why did he not let me do my work?

I was about my business; and a fine and **honorable** business it is, too! I provide people with animals for the blood offering of sacrifice. I'm **more** than a merchant, **I'm** what you might call “a **specialist**!”

Most people don't want to take from their own livestock, so they **buy** an animal for sacrifice – from me, and from others **like** me. They fulfill their religious obligation, and they don't have to worry about giving up **anything** more than a few dollars.

That's not a bad **price** for security of your property and for an easy conscience.

Well, anyway, a few days will pass and this idiot will lose his following. Then, we can go back to “business as usual.” It's happened before. The new merchandise will be more **expensive**, though. I mean, I've lost **profits** and **goods**. **Someone's** got to pay for them. …"

[Mariamne returns:]

The men are **so** **angry**, they are determined to **do** something about him. Jesus of Nazareth – son of a carpenter. A **fool** – that's what **he** is!

**[Narrator/Reporter]**

And **do** something about Jesus was exactly what happened. Other events of that last week of his life are common knowledge to many people.

It wasn't long before people started denying him, … even one of his own **disciples**. He was tried and convicted by a procedure that made mockery of **any** law. But, he had to **pay** the price for angering those in power.

Yet, even by his **death**, he fulfilled the Scriptures – as God kept his promise of redemption and love. Not many of us understood, then. There are **still** those who have questions.

**[Mary of Magdala]**

"I am Mary from the city of Magdala. I knew Jesus for several months before his trial. To him, I owe so much! In fact, I owe him **everything!** As a young woman, I was less than a “perfect person,” to say the least. I was **often** in trouble. I never **knew** what it was to be happy.

Then, I met Jesus. **He** showed me God's forgiveness. It was like having the weight of the world lifted from my shoulders.

Someone asked me what he was like. It's so hard to put into words. When he taught, it was with wisdom that went beyond his years. For that matter, no mere man **ever** possessed such wisdom, or **expressed** it as **beautifully**.

Joanna, Suzanna, and I (along with several other women,) traveled with Jesus and his disciples. I saw him perform many deeds that were nothing less than **miracles**. The lame were healed and the sick recovered, when he was there. But his **greatest** miracle was the way He changed the lives of people like **me**. He forgave the guilt-ridden and comforted the grieving. He made people's spirits whole, and he was a peacemaker – making peace **between** people, and **inside** people. Truly, God **was** **in** this man!

Now, he's dead and I don't understand why. He did only good. Yet, the very people for whom he did the **most** have **killed** him.

Some say he died because of the Temple riot. He just wanted people to use the Temple the way God **intended**; for **prayer** and for the study of **Scripture**. How can you **pray**, when you're interrupted and **distracted** by the clicking of **silver**? How can you hear the word of God, when you have voices of bartering, and the concerns of profits and losses, rattling through your brain? I mean, it's bad enough when the marketplace is so busy you can't hear your neighbor **shouting** in your ear! But, that's good for business! That's **progress**! But, does it have to be in the Temple, **too**? Is there no **sanctuary** from the chaos of the world?

I guess they just weren't **ready** for God to be in their lives **and** in their **Temple**. Some of his followers say the Temple incident was only an excuse. They say he **had** to die and come back to life to **prove** his **Messiahship**.

Some say his death was an example of his absolute obedience to God. However, **we** do not possess the **strength** to be **that** obedient. Most seem to feel his death paid the price for the disobedience and sinfulness of **all** humanity. Only **God** could die for the sin of **all**. The Man of Nazareth **is** God!

Maybe it **is** why he died. I don't know. I'm only a common **woman**. I know dishes and cleaning and mending. I'm not a scholar, a Rabbi, or a politician. All I know is that I grew to **love** him, in a way I had never loved **anyone**; not even myself. He helped me understand the **true** love of God. Now, he's dead; killed by an angry mob. I wish **I** were the one who was dead.

Maybe, if I find an empty **tomb**, I will feel differently. If he can even conquer the **grave**, as he conquered every **other** obstacle in life, maybe **everyone** will **finally** know the truth about him, about God, and about love. Oh, I **pray** for an empty tomb!"

**[Narrator/Reporter]**

Maybe that's what we **all** need to do: pray for an empty tomb. Maybe **then**, our hearts can be turned from the hard cold facts of **business** to the rightful attitude of **worship**, when we are in the sanctuary. Maybe **then**, we won’t finish our story at his death on the cross, the way our expressions of faith seem to consider only that **finality** to life.

Maybe **then**, we can live as though we **expect** him at every **meal**, at every **meeting**, at every **prayer**.

Maybe **then** we can live the lives he paid for, and charged **us** to live. Did Jesus change too many things too quickly? Maybe in **our** eyes, but certainly not in the eyes of **God**!

Let us remember his prayer: "Not **my** will, but **Thine** be done!" Let us offer the prayer he taught us, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven… Amen."