

“The Temple: Risking Righteous Anger”

A sermon by Pastor Steve Easterday-McPadden
for FUMC Grand Junction, Sunday, March 16, 2025

This sermon can be listened to on the FUMCGJ
website: <https://www.fumcgj.org/>

Scripture for the day: Mark 11:15-19 (12-21) [NLT]

Other references:

Borg, Marcus J. & John Dominic Crossan. *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus' Final Week in Jerusalem* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006).

Levine, Amy-Jill. *Entering the Passion of Jesus: A Beginner's Guide to Holy Week* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018).

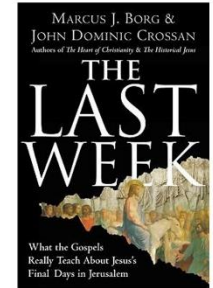
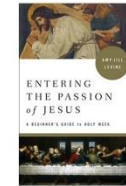
McFee, Marcia. *Worship Design Studio* (<https://www.worshipdesignstudio.com/>). Materials for the worship series, “Entering the Passion of Jesus: Picturing Ourselves in the Story”.

OPENING

- (*Very briefly, bring people back into the narrative world of the worship series*)
 1. We're looking at the days in the last week of Jesus' earthly life but spreading the events of those days out over the whole season of Lent. That way, we'll *s-l-o-w down*, so we can reflect and ask penetrating questions of ourselves with the intent of helping us enter into the passion of Jesus.

2. (*The place for the metaphor of artwork in the series, inviting us to “picture ourselves in the passion of Jesus”.*)

- In addition to what I mentioned last week as to the resources we're using for this series: Marcia McFee's WDS and Amy-Jill



Levine's *Entering the Passion of Jesus*, I'll be referring to another book by the late Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan titled *The Last Week: A Day-by-Day Account of Jesus's Final Week in Jerusalem*.

TO THE SCRIPTURE LESSON for TODAY

- So what about today's lesson? It has to do with an event we think we know a lot about, but there's so much more to discover. We often refer to it as “the cleansing of the Temple”. Depicted in art form, it could've looked like this painting.



SERMON THOUGHTS – Zooming in on Our “Character of the Week”

[Look at Him!] This is what I was afraid of.

Tensions have been so high since we got to Jerusalem, and I saw Jesus get wound up in a way I



have never seen before in these three years of following him. He is the one who sat with children and sick people and talked with outsiders—so able to stay centered in a peace that frankly was beyond my understanding. But now he is so worked up! I'm afraid.

That's it. I'm afraid in this moment that this is going to lead to trouble. Is this really the way to win over his people to his cause? By causing a stir in the Temple? Isn't it the Romans and the corrupt Jewish leaders they have in their pocket that we should be targeting? But instead, he's yelling at the people who are trying to help these pilgrims follow the laws of the Temple!

And yet, I get it. I've been angry too. Not at the people who are trapped in the system, but at the system itself. The way things are. I'm so angry at "the way things are!"

[Credit: Marcia McFee, materials for week 2]

- Two Critical Things to know about this event
 1. Anger precedes and follows it in the story of

the fig tree, which is meant to provide context for the Temple scene. (*Brief recap*) Too often, Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is (mis)interpreted as a sign pointing to His divine powers. That is to completely miss the point. Jesus knows, as does everyone else familiar with the growing seasons in Palestine, that fig trees never produce fruit in the season when Passover occurs. And Mark the Evangelist even tells us this in 11:13. No, this scene, is intended to *interpret* the Temple scene, which it brackets in Mark's Gospel. Just as Jesus symbolically destroyed the fig tree, so His actions in the Temple symbolically destroyed it:

- ✓ Its legitimacy compromised by the corruption of its leaders;
- ✓ Its role in the lives of those who used its system for their own gain, and
- ✓ Its having become a haven for "robbers", which we'll get to next.

Let's suffice it to say that the so called "cleansing of the Temple" is better understood as the "symbolic destruction of the Temple", which made the authorities murderously mad.

2. Mark 11:17... (*"House of prayer for all nations" (a quote of Isaiah 56:7) and "Den of thieves/robbers" (not a quote, but a reference to Jeremiah 7:11)*).

Jesus was not attacking those engaged in facilitating Temple worship for the throngs of pilgrims arriving for the festival of Passover;

their activities were necessary. He was attacking those religious leaders in power and authority with collaboration with the powers of Empire, a manifestation of sin that should sound familiar to you, so closely following our Revelation series just last month and so apparent in our society today.

In other words, the ‘den of robbers’ “...is not where robbers rob, but where they flee for safety after having done their robbing elsewhere” [Levine, 57; Borg & Crossan, 49]. Hence, Jesus’ need to symbolically “destroy” the Temple as described in all four Gospels, differently in all four, but there in all four.

Back to the monologue:

How will anything change?

- Only when we all look at our part in it.
- Only when we see how we prop up the system because of our fear—and for those who benefit from it, because of our greed.
- Only when we search ourselves and...[destroy in the temple of our hearts its complicity with the forces of empire in our nation and our world], will we be able to be the change we want to see.

So I will stay by his side, no matter where this leads.

[Credit: Marcia McFee, materials for week 2]

And so, the challenge to us. Will you and I stay by Jesus’ side, no matter where our commitment to discipleship leads? Lent is the season for asking ourselves this tough question.

A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL NATIONS



The Church for All Nations, Jerusalem



Pediment Details

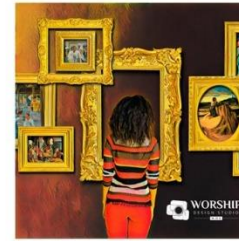
For reference: [Source: <https://tinyurl.com/Pediment-Ch-All-Nations>]—

The triangular pediment above the colonnade is a gorgeous and colorful mosaic depicting Christ as the mediator between God and men. The Savior is depicted in the bottom center in prayerful agony. To His left are a throng of the suffering poor and lowly and to His right are gathered the rich and powerful who amid their own suffering acknowledge that all their earthly glory is mere dust. Both groups look to

Christ with confidence. An angel is shown receiving the Heart of Jesus to present it to God the Father Who is above, seated in glory. This mosaic summarizes all that takes place in the Lord's Passion which began in this holy place— Christ as Mediator, offers His own suffering and...[that] of the world to the Father. This striking scene is explained in the Latin inscription just below it in words taken from...[the book of Hebrews]: “[Jesus] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears...and he was heard because of his reverence” (Heb 5:7 [NRSV]).

WRAP-UP

- (*The RISK in the story: Righteous Anger*)
Amy-Jill Levine offers us a powerful teaching in her book, *Entering the Passion of Jesus*: Jesus doesn't teach that it's wrong to be angry. He teaches that it's wrong to be angry at people. It is right to be angry at the systems of oppression and evil around us [Levine, 51]. This is what she equates with 'righteous anger'. “Righteous anger seeks restitution, not revenge; it seeks correction, not retribution” [Ibid.].
- So, how do we picture ourselves in this second scene in the *passion* of Jesus?
 - Are you and I riskers of righteous anger at the manifestations of collaboration with Empire we see all around us today?



And...how do
YOU picture
YOURself in the
passion of Jesus?



- Do we support the values of injustice, power-mongering, and greed that Jesus symbolically destroyed when His accusers thought they had destroyed His body, the “real Temple” in this story?
- Is Jesus someone we would hide from in our own locally constructed “den of robbers”? Or is He really the Redeemer of our souls?

♪ REPRISE of Choir's anthem, “Redeemer of My Soul”