

Readings:

[Exodus 20:1-17](#)

[Psalm 19](#)

[1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#)

[John 2:13-22](#)

Lord, help us to cleanse our hearts so we can prepare with joy for the Paschal feast.

Yelling at people, turning the furniture over, throwing money on the floor, telling people to get out, and chasing cows and sheep with a whip...
Jesus was kind of upset, it seems like.
Why? What's he so upset about, exactly?

Is it money? Does he not like the idea of people bringing money into the temple? I don't think so. Remember the story of "the widow's mite?" When the widow brought her money put in the offering in the temple, he didn't run over and slap the two little coins out of her hand and yell at her... So, it's not money he objects to, per se... And not even money in the temple.

Is it the animals? Does he think it's inappropriate to have animals running around in the temple? We don't bring animals to church with us, usually (except maybe for the Feast of St. Francis and the Blessing of the Animals). But at the temple, the animals were regularly *part* of the service. They were for sacrifice, to make payment to God for sins – or for thanksgiving. If your worship requires animal sacrifice, you have to have animals there. Jesus' own parents brought doves to the temple to sacrifice when he was a baby. So, he's not upset that there are animals around.

Was it the fact that people were *selling* the animals maybe?
Or that they were ***selling*** them ***in the temple?***

I think that's more the issue – but why was he upset about that? It seems like it would just be a convenience for people needing to get animals for the offerings and sacrifices.

Let's imagine a contemporary parallel.

How could we make it more convenient for people to make offerings at church? You know, sometimes I forget my checkbook, and so I'm not prepared when I get here on first Sundays.

Maybe we could put an ATM in the narthex. Just for convenience.

That way, people could easily get money to put in the offering if they forget and come unprepared.

What do you think? Wouldn't that be helpful?

If the goal of the offering is convenience, then, sure - why not?

Well, it would be *tacky*, for one thing. And generally, Episcopalians are on board with Jesus 100% on this – we don't do tacky. (Thanks be to God!)

But the ATM and convenience store of ready-to-order animal sacrifices at the temple was not just tacky. It also showed that people were lazy and not taking the point of the sacrifice seriously. They were coming to offer sacrifice to God, and they were unprepared. It's not that they didn't know what was being asked of them; they just figured a way to accomplish it in the easiest way possible. And in that, they were totally missing the point.

"God wants a cow for a sin offering – okay – I'll buy one when I get there. That way, I don't have to haul it all the way to Jerusalem. I'll just pick one up at the gate on the way in – less hassle."

God gets pretty frustrated with this attitude and we hear this repeatedly in the Psalms and in the prophets. Here's one example.

"Hear, O my people and I will speak, O Israel, I will testify against you.

I am God, your God. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house, or goats from your folds. For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. ...

If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and all that is in it is mine.

Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High"

(Ps 50:7-14)

I don't need your cow! – it's my cow anyway! I don't need your money. I don't buy things. I **made** everything. Do you seriously think this is about **you** giving me something I **need**?

David gets the point of this in Psalm 51.

"O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

(51: 15-17)

Maybe we would never put an ATM in the narthex – but being lazy about what we offer to God, coming to church with our hearts unprepared ...

Ever do that? And it's not because we don't know it's coming – it happens every week at the same time.

Right now, we're in the season of Lent – which, incidentally, happens every year at the same time. We're supposed to be preparing for Easter, which also (to be clear) happens every year at the same time. If you are concerned about not knowing the exact date, let me show you something. Take a look the Book of Common Prayer that you have there in your seat. Find page 883. Here, you can see when Easter will be for the next 80 years. There's absolutely no excuse to be unprepared.

Don't be lazy and wait to the last minute to try and spiff up that morning –

God is not interested in whether we can take a nice picture wearing clean, new clothes. God is interested in giving us a clean, new life.

How do we prepare for that? We have to give our lives to God to let him clean them up. And how do we do that? By giving up things we are attached to that aren't God – and trying to put God in place of that other stuff.

It's really his place to begin with – like the cows people gave him that he already owned – when we bring offerings and make sacrifices, we're really only giving God what belongs to him in the first place. God doesn't need your cow – he doesn't need your money. He doesn't need the chocolate you're not eating or whatever. God wants your life. In making your sacrifices, then, bring offerings that represents you – your life. God wants to come with you on the journey – he doesn't want some souvenir you picked up in the airport.

So, prepare *now* for Easter. During Lent, give ***yourself*** as an offering and a sacrifice to God.

Amen