

## John 2: 13-22

FRED ROGERS OF MISTER ROGERS NEIGHBORHOOD BECAME A FAVORITE OVER THE YEARS BECAUSE OF HIS GENTLE SPIRIT, WARM SMILE AND QUIET EFFECTIVENESS. ACCORDING TO HIS FAMILY AND FRIENDS, THERE WAS ACTUALLY NO DISCTINCTION BETWEEN THE MISTER ROGERS ON THE PBS TELEVISION SHOW AND THE REAL-LIFE FRED ROGERS. THERE WAS AN ARTICLE WRITTEN BY A MAN WHO INTERVIEWED ROGERS YEARS AGO BEFORE HIS DEATH. FOLLOWING THE INTERVIEW AT THE TV STATION IN PITTSBURGH, ROGERS OFFERED TO DRIVE THE INTERVIEWER BACK TO HIS HOTEL. AS THEY ATTEMPTED TO PULL OUT OF THE STUDIO PARKING LOT ONTO A ROAD CLOGGED WITH RUSH HOUR TRAFFIC, ROGERS SAT AT THE STEERING WHEEL WITH UTTER PATIENCE, CALMING WAITING FOR A CHANCE TO TURN LEFT AND QUIETLY COMMENTING THAT SUCH TRAFFIC WAS TYPICAL FOR THAT TIME OF DAY. "DON'T YOU EVER GET FRUSTRATED WITH ANYTHING?" THE INTERVIEWER ASKED. MISTER ROGERS THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN REPLIED, "SURE. YES. SOMETIMES. SOMETIMES I GET FRUSTRATED. DON'T YOU?" IT WAS CLASSIC MISTER ROGERS!

BUT ALTHOUGH HE BECAME FAMOUS FOR THIS LAID-BACK MANNER, FRED ROGERS DID NOT MAKE HEADLINES JUST BY BEING HIMSELF. WHEN ROGERS GAVE COMMENCEMENT SPEECHES, IT WAS NOT NEWS IF HE SIMPLY STAYED CONSISTENT WITH WHO HE WAS. BUT IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED—AND HOW IT WOULD HAVE BEEN SPLASHED ALL OVER THE MEDIA—IF EVEN JUST ONCE FRED ROGERS SHOWED UP SOMEWHERE AND DELIVERED AN ANGRY DIATRIBE OF A SPEECH. IMAGINE THE SENSATION THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN CREATED IF JUST ONCE A MICROPHONE HAD CAUGHT ON TAPE MR. ROGERS COMPLAINING ABOUT THE AUDIENCE OR COMPLAINING ABOUT HAVING TO GIVE THE SPEECH IN THE FIRST PLACE. SUCH SPECTACLES WOULD HAVE BEEN SO FAR OUT OF CHARACTER THAT THEY WOULD HAVE GRABBED HEADLINES FOR SURE. IF WE THINK THAT WE HAVE A GIVEN PERSON PRETTY WELL SIZED UP, THEN WE EXPECT HIM OR HER TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. OUT-OF-CHARACTER ACTIONS STARTLE US.

MAYBE THAT'S WHY JESUS' DRIVING OUT THE MONEYCHANGERS IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS STORIES IN THE GOSPELS. ALL FOUR GOSPELS RECORD THIS INCIDENT, ALTHOUGH NOT IN THE SAME WAY. BUT THE FACT IS THAT YOU CANNOT READ ANY GOSPEL WITHOUT SOONER OR LATER RUNNING ACROSS THIS INCIDENT IN THE TEMPLE. BUT THIS STORY UNSETTLES AND PERPLEXES US BECAUSE SEEN FROM A CERTAIN ANGLE, THIS SEEMS TO BE THE RARE OCCASION WHEN WE CATCH JESUS, OF ALL PEOPLE, IN A VERY OUT-OF-CHARACTER ACT. WITH A WHIP IN HIS HAND AND FIRE IN HIS EYES, THIS JESUS SEEMS A FAR CRY FROM THE MAN WHO WAS OTHERWISE SO GENTLE AS TO ATTRACT CHILDREN TO HIS SIDE.

BUT PRECISELY WE ARE TALKING ABOUT JESUS, THE WAYS BY WHICH THIS STORY PERPLEX. FOR STARTERS, MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE EACH PRESENTS JESUS CLEANSING THE TEMPLE

AS HAPPENING RIGHT AFTER HIS PALM SUNDAY TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM. IN THESE THREE GOSPELS THIS STORY COMES AT THE END OF JESUS' MINISTRY. IT IS THE DEED THAT LEADS DIRECTLY TO HIS ARREST. BUT AS YOU CAN EASILY SEE BASED ON WHERE WE ARE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL, JOHN SHOWS JESUS DOING THIS EXACT SAME ACTION AT THE VERY *BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY.*

THERE ARE TWO SCHOLARLY OPINIONS TO EXPLAIN THIS DIFFERENCE. ONE OPINION IS THAT JESUS CLEANSED THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM NOT ONCE BUT TWICE, FIRST AT THE BEGINNING OF HIS MINISTRY AND THEN A SECOND TIME AT THE END OF HIS MINISTRY. MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE RECORD THE SECOND CLEANSING BUT NOT THE FIRST WHILE JOHN RECORDS THE FIRST AND NOT THE SECOND.

THE SECOND OPINION IS THAT JOHN CHANGED THE TIMING OF THE EVENT AND MOVED IT OUT OF ORDER.

REGARDLESS OF THE PLACEMENT OF THE STORY, THE TEXT FOCUSES ON THE QUESTION: "WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE THE CHURCH OF JESUS?" AS OUR TEXT BEGINS, PASSOVER IS NEAR. HEARTS AND MINDS ARE FOCUSED ON THE EXODUS EVENT AND EXPECTATIONS OF DELIVERANCE. A FAITHFUL JEW, JESUS COMES TO THE TEMPLE, SACRED SPACE, THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD ON EARTH. IT WAS A MAGNIFICENT PLACE. IN A FUTILE EFFORT TO WIN OVER HIS "UNGRATEFUL" SUBJECTS, HEROD THE GREAT IN 20 BCE HAD BEGUN A MASSIVE RESTORATION AND EXPANSION OF THE TEMPLE THAT WAS STILL UNDERWAY IN JESUS' DAY. WHAT A SIGHT IT MUST HAVE BEEN!

BUT APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEIVING. ENTERING THE TEMPLE PRECINCTS JESUS FOUND LITTLE IN THE WAY OF SACRED SPACE. THE COURT OF THE GENTILES LOOKED ANAD SOUNDED LIKE AN OPEN-AIR MARKET. CATTLE BELLOWING, SHEEP BLEATING, TURTLEDOVES COOING, PEOPLE YELLING, COINS CLANGING. IRONICALLY, THE ACTIVITY WAS NECESSARY FOR THE FUNCTIONING OF THE TEMPLE! THE TEMPLE TAX HAD TO BE PAID IN TEMPLE COINAGE, SO MONEY CHANGERS WERE NECESSARY. BECAUSE SACRIFICIAL ANIMALS HAD TO BE WITHOUT BLEMISH, SELLERS OF SACRIFICIAL ANIMALS WERE NECESSARY. AFTER ALL, WHO COULD MAKE IT ALL THE WAY TO JERUSALEM WITH AN UNBLEMISHED ANIMAL? ALL OF THIS ACTIVITY WAS IN SERVICE TO THE TEMPLE, BUT....DID THESE SERVICES HAVE TO BE RENDERED INSIDE THE TEMPLE? WAS IT NECESSARY TO ROB THE GENTILES OF THE ONE AREA IN THE TEMPLE PRECINCTS THEY WERE ALLOWED TO ENTER AND PRAY?

ENTERING THE TEMPLE, JESUS DISCOVERED HOW DECEIVING APPEARANCES CAN BE. WHILE THE PLACE APPREARED TO FULFILL ITS FUNCTION, CLOSER INSPECTION REVEALED THAT IT HAD FORGOTTEN ITS PURPOSE. THE TRAPPINGS WERE STILL IN PLACE BUT THE PLACE HAD NO HEART FOR ITS REASON. IT HAD BEEN TAKEN OVER BY BUYERS AND SELLERS,

CONSUMERS AND MARKETERS WHO KNEW HOW TO FILL PEWS AND MEET THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN GOALS.

THE WAYS OF THE WORLD INVADE THE CHURCH GRADUALLY, SUBTLY, NEVER INTENTIONALLY, ALWAYS IN SERVICE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION. SOON THE CHURCH IS FULL OF CATTLE AND SHEEP AND TURTLEDOVES AND MONEY CHANGERS!

WHAT JESUS SAW WAS AN OUTRAGE. MOVING THROUGH THE MARKET WITH A WHIP, HE CREATED HOLY HAVOC. HE LEFT NO TABLES UNTOUCHED. IMAGINE THE SCENE: TABLES TURNING OVER, COINS BOUNCING ACROSS THE FLOOR, ANIMALS SQUEALING AND RUNNING WILDLY, THE FLAPPING OF TURTLEDOVE WINGS, AND JESUS CRYING OUT, "TAKE THESE THINGS OUT OF HERE! STOP MAKING MY FATHER'S HOUSE A MARKETPLACE!"

CHALLENGES TO THE STATUS QUO WILL ALWAYS BE DISPUTED. AND JESUS HAD ISSUED SOME CHALLENGE. NOTICE THAT THOSE CHALLENGED DID NOT ASK "WHY" JESUS HAD ACTED IN THIS WAY. THEY KNEW THAT ONE DAY THE LORD OF LORD'S ANOINTED WOULD SUDDENLY APPEAR IN THE TEMPLE TO STRAIGHTEN THINGS OUT. THEY ASKED JESUS FOR EVIDENCE THAT HE WAS THE ONE WITH THE AUTHORITY TO DO THIS! AFTER ALL, THEY WERE DOING THE THINGS THE WAY THEY WERE DOING THEM BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED THEY WERE DOING THEM RIGHT. THEY HAD NO INTENTION OF VIOLATING GOD'S PURPOSES, AND THEY WOULD NEVER KNOWINGLY OPPOSE GOD. ISN'T THIS ALWAYS THE CASE? YET JESUS' WORDS AND ACTIONS SUGGESTED THAT THE TEMPLE FUNCTIONS WERE ACTUALLY ACTING IN OPPOSITION TO GOD'S PURPOSES.

IN VERSE 19 JESUS CONTINUED HIS BLISTERING TEMPLE CRITIQUE. "*YOU DESTROY THE TEMPLE....*" IF THERE IS ANY DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE GOING ON, IT IS HIS CHALLENGERS WHO ARE DOING THE DEED. OUCH. FREDERICK BUECHNER SUGGESTS THAT "*THERE IS NO BETTER PROOF FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD THAN THE WAY YEAR AFTER YEAR HE SURVIVES THE WAY HIS PROFESSIONAL FRIENDS TREAT HIM.*" *YOU DESTROY THIS TEMPLE....IN THREE DAYS I WILL RAISE IT UP.*" LENT OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK WHETHER WE MAY BE "DESTROYING" THE TEMPLE.

JOHN'S GOSPEL HAS A PATTERN: JESUS SPEAKS, HIS WORDS ARE MISUNDERSTOOD, AND CLARIFICATION FOLLOWS. THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS ASSUME THAT JESUS IS REFERRING TO THE MAGNIFICENT HERODIAN TEMPLE. THE IDEA THAT JESUS MIGHT REBUILD SUCH A TEMPLE IN THREE DAYS IS LUDICROUS AT WORST AND UNREASONABLE AT BEST.....*WHEN MISUNDERSTOOD*. JOHN'S GOSPEL CONTINUALLY WARNS US AGAINST THE DANGER OF *MISUNDERSTANDING*—THINKING WE UNDERSTAND JESUS, WHEN THE JESUS WE *THINK* WE UNDERSTAND IS A JESUS OF OUR OWN DESIGN, A JESUS WITH WHOM WE ARE QUITE COMFORTABLE. BUT WHAT IF THERE IS MORE TO HIS WORDS THAN WE ARE HEARING, MORE TO HIS WILL THAN WE ARE DOING?

JOHN PROVIDES THE NECESSARY CLARIFICATION AND A GLIMPSE OF THINGS TO COME. JESUS IS NOT SPEAKING OF THE PHYSICAL TEMPLE BUT OF HIS OWN BODY. HIS CHALLENGERS *WILL* SEEK TO DESTROY HIM. THEY WILL THINK THE DEED IS DONE THAT NOT ONE BONE OF HIS BODY IS LEFT STANDING. FOR AN INSTANT, THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS FALLS OVER THE NARRATIVE. BUT THE CROSS WILL NOT BE THE END, FOR JESUS WILL RISE FROM THE DEAD. PEOPLE WILL TRY TO DESTROY HIM; THEY STILL DO, BUT OUR EFFORTS ARE IN VAIN, FOR NOT EVEN THE TOMB CAN HOLD HIM; HE WILL BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD.

THE MESSAGE TO JOHN'S READERS IS CLEAR: YOU CANNOT UNDERSTAND JESUS UNTIL YOU HAVE THE WHOLE STORY. DURING LENT WE ARE REMINDED THAT THE STORY OF JESUS CULMINATES AT THE CROSS BUT DOES NOT END THERE. TAKING ONLY PARTS OF THE STORY WILL LEAD US TO AN INCOMPLETE AND INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS. AND THAT MIGHT LEAVE US IN A TEMPLE OF OUR OWN MAKING THAT WE THINK IS DEDICATED TO THE PURPOSES OF GOD BUT ACTUALLY STANDS IN OPPOSITION TO THEM. THE MESSAGE IS CLEAR: WE MUST KEEP FIRST THINGS FIRST...JESUS CHRIST AND HIS CHURCH.