

Sermon: John 2:13-22 **Jesus Cleanses the Temple**

**Sunday, March 7, 2021 - Lent 3**  
**Heart Lake United Church**  
**Rev. Margaret MacDonald**

**Introduction:** Tomorrow is international women's day. I would not have chosen this text from John's gospel to be my first sermon. Here I stand to plant a seed of faith from God's Word. We hope for a world of equity, justice, inclusion and the abundance of life for our daughters, grand-daughters, mothers, spouse, sisters and all women as we dream with ambition to become the person God created women to be.

**Let us pray:** Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you our Christ and Redeemer. Amen.

Do you remember a time when you have been stirred up enough to interfere in a conversation or situation for spiritual justice or social justice or both? **How did it work?** Did it stir your emotions of anger, frustration, bitterness or impatience? Did it make you turn towards the cross of Jesus where you embraced faith, strength, resilience and courage? I know you do and I have been there too.

I recalled some of the times the institutional church wrestled with both spiritual justice and social justice. I named a few such as the ordination of women, the inclusion of GLBTQ 2 to the faith community, Reconciliation with Indigenous people, Black lives matter. The institutionalization of slavery, Systemic injustices with immigration, unemployment and the endless list of issues, policies, regulations that have profoundly impacted negatively on the daily lives of people across cultures, boundaries, socio-economic status, religious barriers among others. All these issues and more are real within the institutional church and our society.

During the recent political saga in the USA vice-president Kamala Harris was described by the Southern Baptist church as Jezebel. A black woman called to serve the highest office in the USA is negatively portrayed by the church/Christian community. The image of Jezebel bears both subtle and blatant strands of racism, gender discrimination, sexual orientation, systemic injustices and more.

As we reflect on our journey and history we celebrate the accomplishments of women in all aspects of society and the church. We acknowledge

women across the world whose leadership brought major changes in every fabric of society such as politics, religion, culture, education, health and economics.

In the words of Shirley Chisholm I quote, “**Tremendous amounts of talent are lost to our society just because that talent wears a skirt.**” **End of quote.**

In our Brampton community I want to name Cassie Campbell an outstanding hockey player. Like many of you I am a Raptors fan but I recalled the first time I drove by the Cassie Campbell rec centre, I said here is a gym and **my grand-daughter Rebecca corrected me that it’s a rec centre grandma.** Every time I drive by I think of an outstanding woman in sports who left the legacy of a lifestyle fitting for all.

In the area of social justice and politics I named Jean Augustine. Jean was born in Grenada, the Caribbean and became the first Black Canadian immigrant woman to be elected to Canada’s House of Commons. She served as a member of parliament for the Toronto area riding of Etobicoke –Lakeshore. Her story is a testimony to the power of her resilience, dedication to the teaching profession, hard work, perseverance and devotion to the pursuit of social justice. On 500 Markell drive, Brampton is a secondary school named Jean Augustine.

John tells us a powerful story at the beginning of Jesus ministry. Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem and takes a stance for **both spiritual and social justice.** The other gospels Matthew, Mark and Luke put this story of Jesus cleansing the temple at the end of Jesus ministry. I believe, Jesus cleansed the temple twice and the cleansing is on-going. Jesus sees the need for transformation to the hearts of the temple leaders and the community followers. **We too need to hear this story more than once.**

The people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover. The feast of the Passover was a significant spiritual ritual in the life of the Judean community. It was a time when the community remembered the stories of their ancestors. They recalled how God stood among them, protected and provided for them through their wilderness journey. God faithfully delivered them out of bondage and brought them from Egypt to Canaan. The people went to Jerusalem to commemorate this festival by offering a sacrifice in the temple of worship.

In those days a temple tax was required by those who offered their sacrifice. The local vendors brought their livestock, goats, cattle, doves and merchandise to the temple. It was in the temple that the sales took place.

The annual Passover feast provided a good business for the local community. The hustle and bustle also created a competition between the local vendors and the money changers in the temple. The value of the local currency was lesser than the foreign currencies. The money changers in the temple required the temple tax to be pure silver coins hence the competition between the local vendors and money changers. Some scholars would say that there was fair exchange of merchandise and service provided for the travelers to Jerusalem.

### **Then, why is there a problem?**

Jesus entered the temple **for worship as was his custom**. Jesus is enraged at what was happening in the temple. Jesus drove out the cattle, money changers, vendors and turned over the tables. "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace! His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (V16-17). The temple in Jerusalem was the sacred place for the community to worship and it became chaotic and disdained. The spiritual and social injustices within the faith community and society broke the heart of Jesus and stirred his emotions deeply.

### **What is the message from this story today that will help bring positive changes to your heart and to the community of faith?**

God's message is one that is focused on Jesus. Jesus is the centre of the faith community. It was difficult for God to get this message across to the people then as it is today. In order for God to get this message across to us God sent Jesus to die on the cross for the entire world. The cross bears a message of salvation. The cross is costly grace. Jesus saves us from shame, disgrace, discrimination, spiritual and social injustices, marginalization, segregation and all other forms of systems and attitudes that dehumanize humanity. The people in the faith community gather to worship Jesus. The cross is a powerful message of forgiveness and healing of humanity brokenness. We can change and reform structures,

systems and correct attitudes. The Good News is Jesus calls us to **spiritual justice**. It is the cleansing of the heart that will build relationships in community and with Jesus.

In my ministry in Guyana the communities of faith that I served rebuilt and remodeled their sanctuary. The conversation included using the cross that was there since the church was first built. Do we need a new cross? Why? Where it will be placed in the new design? How much it will cost? And all the other ramifications that comes with decision-making in the church. My answer is the message of the cross may look like foolishness to us writes St Paul to the early followers of Jesus because we cannot fully understand the mystery of Christ death and the power of the resurrection.

I heard the story of a church being remodeled and the first thing the architect said to the members is that this cross has to go. It is too huge and outdated. Imagine the stir of emotions that took place among members. The reaction certainly triggered a conversation. The minister asked the people to meet in small groups and reflect on what is the meaning of the cross for them.

These are some of the responses the cross has always been there. We take it for granted. We have forgotten the true meaning of why we have the cross among us. We come to the cross as the fount of our baptismal renewal. It is at the cross we seek grace, strength and faith to move forward.

The cross says we are forgiven, blessed with the freedom to worship amidst the challenges of life. We are saved by God's grace. We are not alone on this journey. The cross is God's message of salvation given to the world and there is power in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is life-giving!

It took a stranger to stir the emotions deeply for spiritual justice among the people of faith. The season of Lent is a time of returning and turning our direction towards the cross. The cross is

like our spiritual GPS that steers us into the direction. Gathering in community for worship keeps our focus on Jesus and help us to grow on our spiritual journey. Jesus is building healthy relationships with you and one another.

The cross of Jesus is in our hearts. The real work of the power of the cross is when we leave this worship gathering and go into the wider community. The Word of God keeps our spiritual GPS focus on the direction God wants us to go. When we detour from God's justice the cross stands as a reminder that Jesus loves you and me and the whole world. Amen