



LENT 3

THE NEW SHOFAR

In faithful disciples of Christ, God is making a home

Exodus 20:1-17 - John 2:13-25

Pull down the Temple and build a new one with me as the cornerstone

By the time John was writing his Gospel, the Church had come to understand the death of Jesus in the light of their rethinking of the Jewish Passover (**1 Corinthians 5:7**...*Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch, as you really are unleavened. For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed*). Being associated with the Passover meant his death and resurrection had to be understood in the light of what this feast was celebrating and what it meant for Israel. It is against this background we can now appreciate the comments of Jesus on the pulling down of the Temple – it is somehow associated with death leading to freedom, salvation and new life. It is this Passover, along with the Passover associated with his death that are meant to serve as a commentary on the whole of his ministry (for John). Jesus is a part of the ongoing saving works of God, divine activities that can be appreciated with the Exodus events in our mind. Jesus is the way to emancipation, freedom, the Way to a whole new way of living in a radically transformed world.

**What does Paul's call to "clean out the old yeast" mean for Christians and parishes today?
What is our "yeast"?**

Christ is our Passover Lamb, the sacrifice offered for the forgiveness of our sins. How should this core element of our Christian faith challenge and transform the way we live?

What/where is the Temple we are building?

Here we find Jesus challenging the fundamental authority of the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem, a leadership centred around the Temple. There can be little doubt Jesus made a prophesy about the destruction of the Temple but he was not the only one to make such a declaration. Indeed, the rabbis, after the Temple had been destroyed in 70 AD were willing to acknowledge that the Temple alone was unable to save Jerusalem from the judgment sent upon it by God. God required much more than just religious sacrifices from his people. They began to appreciate what it was the prophets had said to Israel before, during and after the 587^{B.C.} exile in Babylon. Spoke of a need to challenge the way people

were reflecting upon God, the divine ways and what it was that made them God's people. The Temple was little more than a place, a symbol of something far greater than stone and mortar. If the symbol became the central thing and all that went on within the Temple represented the main part of their lives with the God of Israel, then it was an empty sign, a stagnant symbol. Hence its destruction. The Psalmist offers us a great Lenten challenge: **How can we sing the song of the Lord on alien soil? How can we witness to a living God outside of our formal times of worship, outside of our church buildings, liturgical celebrations and events?**

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The only lasting Cornerstone for fullness of life is Jesus the Christ

As we ponder what John was trying to say to us in retelling this event it is worth looking at Mark 12:10-11 as it provides us with something of an insight into some of the thinking of the early community of believers as they reflected on the role of the Temple, the future and the death of Jesus...¹⁰ *Have you not read this scripture (here Jesus is speaking): “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; ¹¹ this was the Lord’s doing, and it is amazing in our eyes”?*’ It would appear that Jesus himself understood there would be a new “Temple” and that this “Temple” would have himself as its foundation stone.

What did Jesus have in mind here when he talks of needing a “new temple”? Who will build it and what materials will be used? What are its foundations?

This insight had already been taken up by Paul and his own community understood this new Temple to be a spiritual reality more than a physical building...**1 Corinthians 3:16**...*Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?*...and also **Ephesians 2:20-22**...*built upon the foundation of the apostles and*

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God. At the same time there was this talk of the Temple Jesus declared he would remain forever in his Father’s “House” *The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there for ever* (8:35).

The ancient peoples believed their temples were centres where their gods dwelt, places in which they could make contact with the gods, sacrifice to them and plead their case for blessings, for mercy and for guidance. The Exodus events revealed to the Jews a different understanding of God. Israel’s God walked with them along the road to freedom. Their God fed them, guided them, consoled them and gave them a whole new life in a land of *milk and honey*. No temple humans might build could ever be a suitable dwelling place for their God. No building could ever match the magnificence of the universe God made by just a simple word of command!

Reflect on the spiritual significance of John’s use of the word “home” for “temple”.

And so in using these different words (House instead of Temple) what John is inviting readers to do is to make a comparison between Herod’s Temple (physical) and the New Temple (spiritual) with Jesus as the foundation stone. Jesus was to remain *in his Father’s House* and he would be preparing a room there for his disciples so they might live with him (14:2). Jesus replaces the old Temple in that he is now and forever the “place” in which the people of God can interact with the Father. There is no need for a new physical Temple as the faithful now have Jesus... *I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb* (Revelation 21:22). In this way of thinking, it is possible to live in the presence of God today, to have a foretaste of what eternal life in God will mean. That gift is opened up to us in Christ. By living *in Christ* we are living in God.

How can we cleanse our own bodies “lives” so they are suitable dwelling places for God? How can our parishes become true “temples” for God, communities where the world experience God?

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