



Have you ever had a really good day or week or even season of life where things just went your way, and you felt supported and encouraged and felt like there was a lot of momentum in the right direction...and then all of a sudden something happened that was completely contrary to that and caught you off guard, or caused a strong reaction in you that was completely opposite of how you were when everything was going smoothly just a short time before?

We are in just such a place right now in Kirkland and our nation. Much of the world, in fact, has taken a turn for the worse. Things had been rolling along pretty well for the most part in our community. That's not to say everything is perfect or that there aren't differences of opinion. But the economy has mostly been strong, unemployment is low, we have several of the best schools and school districts in the nation right here, we live in a part of the country that a lot of other people would like to move to (even if we all complain about the housing costs and the traffic)...we finally get sunsets after 5:00 p.m. thanks to daylight savings time...I mean things were trending in the right direction.

**And then this thing called the Coronavirus shows up.** Now people are stressed out, schools are closed for several weeks, the economy has come to a screeching halt, retirement funds are shrinking, businesses are closing, the NCAA basketball tournaments are cancelled, the NBA has hit the pause button on the season, and the starts of the Major League Soccer and Major League Baseball seasons are delayed. Though if this goes long enough, maybe they'll cancel the MLB season and we will be spared the annual tragedy of the Mariners. Maybe that's the silver lining in all of this.

But the point is: **Things have really taken a big turn in a different direction.** I had never even heard of a coronavirus until a couple months ago, and when I did I wasn't sure if a particular Mexican beer would cause it or prevent it. ☺ But now we're all fairly in the know about this thing. It's a completely different world for us than it was just a short time ago. It's even

worse in parts of Asia, and Italy and elsewhere as you know...but Kirkland and much of Western Washington has taken a drastic turn from where we were.

And although the scale of things is a little different, this is analogous to what Jesus experienced in the span of even just a few minutes near the end of his life. Last week we looked at his triumphal entry where he's celebrated and praised and adored by the vast majority of people as he comes into Jerusalem in a one-person parade. Things are looking good.

Once he's there, he goes into the temple grounds. If you were reading this for the first time, you might expect the praising and the palm waving and so forth to continue. But instead, the joy and the celebration turns to frustration for Jesus. Let's read this passage from Matthew 21. We're reading verses 12-17, which follow on the heels of Jesus' festive entry into Jerusalem. **Matthew 21:12-17 here.**

### **Sermon Title Graphic**

So Jesus comes into the Jewish temple complex in Jerusalem. This would have been in the outer court of the temple facility, not in any of the inner courts where corporate worship took place. He comes into this part of the temple and he sees things happening that are simply not right. Now the reason he does this is seen in his statement, "But you are making it a den of robbers." This is a quote from Jeremiah 7, and is in contrast with first part of the statement about the temple being a "house of prayer" which is a quote from Isaiah 56. So Jesus creates a Scriptural mash-up of two Old Testament verses to communicate his displeasure with what is going on.

**Clearly Jesus' anger is because what should be a holy place has been turned into an unholy place.** Now, the business being transacted was not in and of itself bad; in fact, it was expected. It equipped people to worship as they exchanged Roman coins for the Jewish coins used in worship, and they bought animals for sacrifice. The problem was that they'd turned it into "a den of robbers": price-gouging, unfair business practices such as exchange rates that ripped people off, and so forth. What's happening here is not God-

honoring.

**And when we contrast this scene with the parade scene just before, you can't help but see huge a change in atmosphere and in Jesus' countenance!** Jesus shows his holy righteousness as he expresses his anger at this. A lot of people read this passage and really struggle with it because it shows a different side of Jesus. Where is Jesus, gentle meek and mild? Do you think people were singing "What a friend we have in Jesus" as he did this? Maybe those who were getting ripped off were singing it. But even they must have been startled at Jesus' reaction. And most people read this today and are simply caught off-guard by Jesus' reaction as well.

Well: **What we see here is that Jesus hates sin.** These people were gouging their neighbor. They weren't loving them. We've seen this exact same thing happen in the last week or so. Maybe you read about the guy back east who bought up 17,000 bottles of hand sanitizer hoping to sell them on Amazon and Ebay for a significant profit. But the websites have come down hard on price-gougers like that and now he's stuck with all these items. He literally cannot sell them. He was not loving toward his neighbor, and Jesus despises that kind of behavior. Unfortunately, we all struggle with sin like this in some way, shape or form, and Jesus doesn't like any of it. And if sin makes us "dirty" then we see God's desire for us to be clean throughout Scripture.

Just this week I came across a verse that reminds us of this that is particularly appropriate for state of things with the coronavirus. Isaiah 1:16, reads, **"So wash your hands. Make yourselves clean. Get your evil actions out of my sight! Stop doing what is wrong!" (Isaiah 1:16).** First of all, can we just all agree that those first few words demonstrate the practicality of Scripture. "Wash your hands!" That is some practical wisdom from some around 700 B.C.

But then there's the rest of the verse: "Get your evil actions out of my sight. Stop doing what is wrong." God deeply desires for us to live rightly, not wrongly. It bothers God when we don't love God with all we've got and don't love our neighbor as ourselves. And that is exactly what Jesus encountered there in the temple, and so he did something about it, much as he

does something about our sin through his death on the cross.

Matthew continues on to write that other people kept coming to Jesus to be healed. The blind came, the lame...these are people who were on the margins and discounted by the majority. Perhaps some of them were the ones being cheated out of their money by the unethical dealers in the temple court. And then the children who were there kept praising Jesus and lifting him up, shouting out “Hosanna to the Son of David!” The Pharisees hear it and they know it’s directed at Jesus. And to them that’s heretical as Jesus accepts their praise.

**So they ask him, “Don’t you hear what these children are saying?” (Matthew 21:16).** In other words, “They’re lifting you up as King in the lineage of David. Aren’t you going to stop it, since that’s not who you are?” And Jesus quotes a verse from Psalm 8, probably written by King David himself: “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise.” In other words, Jesus gives his blessing on these children and defends them, and accepts their worship as appropriate and right.

One thing I love about children is that they are often oblivious to the things that cause tension and worry and conflict for us adults. Either they’re oblivious to it, or if they’re aware of it, they don’t let it derail them, and they just plow on. And so they’ll do things and say things in certain situations that we adults never would. Like the preacher's son who once asked him, “Dad, I notice every Sunday morning when you first come out to preach, you sit up on the platform and bow your head. What are you doing?” The father explained, “I'm asking the Lord to give me a good sermon.” The little boy said, “Then why doesn't he?”

That’s a humbling moment for a dad who’s a preacher, right? But kids will do these kinds of things. And here are some kids, in the midst of, or right after this moment where Jesus is upset, and there’s all this wrongdoing going on in the temple courts, and they come along continuing the praise that started with the one person parade. **They’re not letting this other stuff get in the way of their praise of Jesus, and Jesus affirms them for it.** There may have been a change in the atmosphere...the momentum of the parade, as far as the adults

were concerned, may have gotten stalled by the moneychangers; but for the kids it just keeps going. Why let that stop them from praising Jesus? Why get derailed? Why let the Pharisees looks of disapproval stop them?

Remember last week in Luke's account of Jesus' entry to Jerusalem we saw how the Pharisees asked Jesus to quiet down the crowds that were praising him and Jesus was like, "No way Jose!" And the Pharisees persist here, in addition to the moneychanging issues...but none of it stops these kids from giving Jesus their praise. And Jesus receives it all. Not in arrogance, but in humility. He didn't ride a horse into town; he a donkey . It's the equivalent of the queen of England in a motorcade where rather than riding in her usual Bentley limousine, she's riding in a Ford Pinto. Jesus comes in humility, even as he's being hailed as a king.

And so as everyone is praising him in spite of the opposition wanting to quiet them down and showing their disapproval, in spite of the moneychangers gouging them... **We see here the depth of giving Jesus our praise.** We see the depth of worshipping Jesus...of staying focused and centered on Him and lifting him up above whatever else may be going on in life around us. Life may take a turn for the worse, there may be challenges to overcome, there may be people who look askance at your faith and what Jesus is doing in your life...there may be obstacles to overcome like a virus, like school's being closed, like businesses struggling...and those are very real challenges with big impacts on people. We don't want to dismiss those things or pretend they aren't real – in our own lives or in the lives of the others. We can bring those situations to the Lord, and pray for his grace and mercy and healing and comforting and more. We don't need to be fake with God; he can handle whatever is weighing upon us. **But none of that need cause us to stop our praise of Him, either.**

We see it throughout Scripture as God's people continue to praise him and lift him up no matter the circumstances: Job, David, Habakkuk, Isaiah...well, all the OT prophets, pretty much...Stephen, Paul, and others. Their praise of God was not dependent upon the circumstances around them or their situation in life.

So no matter whether life is going perfectly smooth or whether a virus has thrown a monkey-wrench into the midst of things: Let's turn to God in praise. Let your heart praise him! Let your lips praise him! Let your body praise Him! God, who hates the sin in my life and in your life and the separation it causes between us and him and between each of us and the other people in our lives... This God has reaches forth his hand from heaven and introduces us to forgiveness and grace and second chances through Jesus Christ – crucified and resurrected. That is worth praising God for! So He is worthy of all our praise and nothing needs to stop the praise we give in response. Nothing! That is the depth of our praise. It's not a shallow, "surfacey" praise we offer. It has deep roots that can continue in the storms of life, because it's all in response to the depth of the God of the Universe, who created everything seen and unseen, has given us life, and has conquered the grave. For all of that and more: we praise him all the time. As David writes in the last verses in the book of Psalms:

**Praise the Lord!**

**Praise God in his sanctuary;**

**praise him in his mighty heavens!**

**Praise him for his mighty deeds;**

**praise him according to his excellent greatness!**

**Praise him with trumpet sound;**

**praise him with lute and harp!**

**Praise him with tambourine and dance;**

**praise him with strings and pipe!**

**Praise him with sounding cymbals;**

**praise him with loud clashing cymbals!**

**Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!**

**Praise the Lord! (Psalm 150:1-6)**

Let's do exactly that in all seasons of life. Let's pray...Amen.