3rd Sunday of Lent, B

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What do you think of table-turning, animal-driving, whip-carrying Jesus? What do you imagine would set him off that day? And what do we do with this story?

There was a time when I heard this story as being mostly about anger. Jesus got angry. I get angry. So, it is ok to get angry if you are angry about the right thing. Maybe, but I think there is more to this story than that. I wonder if what we see Jesus doing might not be an expression of his deepest compassion for life, for the temple, for the world, for you and me.

There was a time when I thought Jesus was upset about the animals and the money changers being in the temple. Maybe, but again I think there is more to this story than that. I don't think Jesus was surprised by the animals and money changers. He grew up as a faithful Jew going to the temple. He didn't show up that day and said, **"Wow! There are animals and money changers here. I didn't know that. This doesn't seem right."**

The animals and money changers had always been there. That's how the system worked. It was business as usual for them to be there. Business as usual meant changing Roman coins to temple coins, purchasing an animal, and offering a sacrifice.

I think business as usual is the issue. The animals and money changers are not the problem. They are the symptom that something else is going on.

I think Jesus went to the temple that day for one purpose and with one intention; to throw out and overturn business as usual. Sometimes we need the tables of our life overturned, and the animals thrown out. It is just so easy to fall into the trap of business as usual.

Have there not been times in your life when you realized that business as usual was costing you your life? Have there not been times when you realized that business as usual was leaving you spiritually bankrupt? Have there not been times in your life when you kept on keeping on but nothing changed?

Business as usual can happen anywhere: in friendships, marriages, parenting, work, church. It is all the habits and routines we fall into that cause us to sleepwalk through this world. We look but we don't see, we listen but we don't hear, we speak but don't say anything.

It happens whenever we push the auto-pilot button and life becomes mechanical. We go through the motions. We show up but we are not there. Have you ever smiled that **"I am good, and everything is fine"** smile but behind the smile, there was an emptiness, you felt hollow, and your heart was breaking? That's carrying on with business as usual. Or maybe you wake up in the morning and you are as exhausted as you were when you went to bed the night before. Business as usual. Have you ever felt like

you were just not yourself? Nothing seemed right? Boredom overcame creativity. There was no enthusiasm, wonder, or imagination. It was just business as usual. Sometimes we look at life and the world and it all seems in vain. Is this all there is to me and my life? What have I accomplished? Who am I? We are busy but not getting anywhere. There is no depth or meaning, only business as usual.

There are thousands of reasons and ways in which we fall into business as usual. There is one thing, however, that I keep coming back to. Forgetfulness. Business as usual is born of forgetfulness.

It happens every time we forget the original beauty of our creation. It happens whenever we forget the God-given dignity of humanity, ours, or another's. It happens whenever we forget that we have been created in the image and likeness of God. It happens whenever we forget that after creation **"God saw everything that God had made, and indeed, it was very good."** It happens whenever we forget the grace and possibilities bestowed upon us at our baptism. It happens when we close ourselves to the future. It happens anytime we forget that Jesus turns the water of our lives into wine. It happens anytime we forget that **"the Word became flesh and dwelled among us"** as one of us. It happens every time we forget that **"we have all received grace upon grace."**

When we forget that we are the temple of God, the very residence of God, life can easily become a series of transactions. Relationships and intimacy are lost. Priorities get rearranged. Our world is small. Making a

living replaces living a life, and the life we have becomes a marketplace rather than a place for meeting the holy in ourselves and one another. And it is business as usual.

That is what Jesus is overturning and driving out of the temple. Here is why I say that. When the authorities ask for a sign from Jesus for what he is doing he says, **"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."**

The authorities don't understand. They are thinking of a stone and mortar temple, but Jesus is talking about a flesh and blood temple. The temple he is talking about is the temple of human life.

"In three days" – what does that make you think of? What happens on the third day? Resurrection, a new life, a new beginning, a rebirth. It is no longer business as usual.

Repeatedly Jesus interrupts, disrupts, overturns, and throws out business as usual.

It was no longer business as usual for the Samaritan woman. She is no longer the woman who had five husbands and lives with a sixth man. She is a well of living water. It was no longer business as usual for a man who lay paralyzed on his mat for thirty-eight years. He took up his mat and walked. It was no longer business as usual for the 5000 empty and hungry people. They left that mountainside full and satisfied. It was no longer business as usual for the woman caught in adultery. **"Neither do I condemn you,"** Jesus said, **"go your way."** It was no longer business as

usual for the man blind from birth. **“One thing I do know,”** he said, **“though I was blind, now I see.”** It was no longer business as usual for four days dead Lazarus. He came out of the tomb.

If those stories tell us anything they tell us that we are not intended to live a business as usual life. It is too small for us. Lent is a season that invites us to look at the ways our life has become business as usual, to make changes, clean out, and prepare for a new life, a new day, the third day.

I wonder, what business as usual looks like in your life today? What tables need to be overturned? What animals need to be driven out? What does the temple of your life need today? And what are you willing to do about that?

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The poet David Whyte ends his poem **“Sweet Darkness”** with these lines: ***“Anything or anyone that does not bring you alive is too small for you.”***

Business as usual is a life too small for you, the temple, the world. **Amen.**