

**Streams of Living Water: Wash Us Clean**  
A Worship Design Studio Series for Lent—Adapted from Roll Down Justice  
**Lent 3 March 7, 2021 Trinity UMC**

**Scripture Mark 11: 15 – 18 (NRSV)**

Then Jesus and his friends came to Jerusalem.  
And Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out  
those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple,  
and he overturned the tables of  
the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves;  
and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.  
He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,  
'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?'  
But you have made it a den of robbers."  
<sup>18</sup> And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it,  
they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him,  
because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching.

**Sermon 'Dreaming of a Church'**

I remember hearing a comedienne riffing on how there are 2 kinds of people:  
Those who make their beds in the morning.  
Those who don't.

She had us all in stitches comparing the bed makers i.e. strict, rule followers who were afraid that spiders would invade their beds and the bed breakers who didn't care about neat corners and tidy pillows, preferring to be free spirits, because after all, what's the point when you're just going to get back into bed again that night, or, I think she said...misguided slob. No offense to anyone here of course. You know how comediennes are, right?

Well, I think of her schtick sometimes as I roll out of bed in the morning and kind of sort of make my bed. I have a quilt that I got at ShopKo on sale...that I use as a bed-spread. Pastel greens and mint blue and brown accents that interestingly enough match perfectly with orange kittens when they lay in the sun that comes through that southern window. And every morning, I shake that quilt out so that it covers up the sheets and blankets. And I tug at it until it's nicely squared off with the pillows peeking out of the top. And I'm satisfied that I have made my bed.

But...what I don't do is straighten the sheets or make sure that they are tucked in and correctly contoured around the corners of the mattress. I don't flatten or straighten out the blankets that all rumped from a night of me rolling from one side of the bed to another. So maybe you can imagine on the surface of the bed: A well placed quilt covering obviously lumpy blankets and scrunched up sheets. You could not roll a marble across my bed because it would get stopped by a mound of blankets or stuck in a valley between the two wrinkles. But it's good enough for me and the cats. I've met my standards and go about my day knowing that don't really qualify as a bed-maker but I'm also not a full-blown bed breaker aka slob.

God doesn't care how you (or I) make the bed, but we can't just come to church every Sunday and pretend that everything else is fine. The scripture reading this morning reminds us that God is dreaming of a Church on earth and Jesus came to remind us of that dream that includes much more than a quick cover-up for God's house.

The Jerusalem temple priests and authorities had a pretty good system going on with buyers and sellers and money changers. They were all probably assigned there certain spots with traffic flow all figured out. I imagine that the business of the Temple was conducted according to a pretty strict set of rules and regulations. It all may have looked good to an uninformed observer but Jesus NO WAY. Not on my watch. And Jesus tore away the covering of respectability and expediency. He drove out the buyers and the sellers and over turned tables and said: Underneath your false front there is a huge mess that needs to be cleaned up BECAUSE....

***God's Temple is a House of Prayer and not a marketplace and you have made it into a den or thieves.***

In this season of Lent, we are called to tear down the false screens in our lives that hide the ugly truth about what's going wrong.

We are called to claim what we have forgotten about what God wants of us.

Lent creates a space for us to lift off the pretty quilted covers that we present to the world and to tidy up, tuck in the sheets and straighten the blankets in our lives.

Each of you are taking that Lenten task seriously as you attend worship and as you continue with your Lenten practices...in whatever form they take. I respect and support you in your personal devotions and process.

Let's not forget that the Scripture today reminds us that Lent is not just a personal practice. Our church also is also called to review and repent and lament and seek to washed clean by the healing streams of water that run to the sea and continue to flow with God's love, mercy and judgment.

I want to assure you that for us at Trinity, that Lenten process is taking place as we work within the Church Unique Framework...highlighting our Mission to Share God's love with those who hunger. We are living into our values. The Church Council has committed to a monthly review of Strategies, using agreed upon measures to mark our progress. You will be hearing more about that as the year goes on.

Of course, it's not just about Trinity. The Lenten practices extend to our United Methodist Denomination. I wonder what Jesus would be saying if he were here and now, looking at the work of the UMC? Have we have thrown a clean and well-chosen bedspread over the rumpled blankets and twisted sheets of our denomination? Maybe so. Are we living out the dream of being a House of Prayer? Maybe not.

I bring this up because Jesus brings it up. Jesus walks into the Jerusalem temple and sees underneath the fancy decorations and well crafted procedures. And he can't stay silent. We Methodists shouldn't either. And we are not. Let me tell you about just a few of the things that are going on that you might not know about if you don't receive all the emails and news updates that I do!

First of all, the UMC is looking at dismantling racism within our organization by examining our history as a denomination. Where did we have a chance to speak out against the horrors of slavery, but we didn't? Where did we have a chance to honor indigenous people but chose instead to restrain and restrict and re-write them? Where have we excluded people rather than including them? How does the Methodist denomination accommodate racism, maybe without even knowing it?

Secondly, the UMC is looking at Decolonizing the denomination...even as we are in the time between, waiting for re-organization of the church. Questions are being asked and answered about our Organizational structure and how it has elevated some people into positions of authority while ignoring other groups. How certain groups are given power which they don't share with others. How the white American way of doing things has taken precedence in this Global denomination...over other and equally valid ways of organizing and structuring ourselves. What about our finances...are we functioning in any way as robbers and a den of thieves? Taking from those who have so little to give and allocating for the security of the Bureaucracy rather than for the work of God? Maybe so.

And lastly...The denomination is even looking at our Logo...the Cross and the Flame and wondering if now is the time to think about a change. More than a few people in my years of ministry have talked to me about how the Cross and Flame symbol makes them think about the Ku Klux Klan and white supremacists burning crosses on the lands and lawns of people of color? Is there a chance that we Are being insensitive to a hurtful and damaging past by keeping that as our current symbol?

These are hard and challenging conversations and discussions. Hard things to talk about. They create tension, don't they? Raise blood pressure. But don't let that stop you from considering the need to uncover the wrinkles and valleys in the Methodist bedroom, so to speak. There is much that has been covered up for too long. Wouldn't you just hate for Jesus to show up at the next General or Annual or Church Conference and start throwing stuff around saying...Clean up your act! My Father's House is for prayer...not for accumulation and preservation. Trust in me, Jesus says, for new life and for becoming a church that honors God and serves those in need. Even if the chief priests and scribes become afraid, as they were with Jesus. And planning to kill him. We're not that intense right now...but it happened to Christ didn't it?

Yes, the current denominational conversations are difficult...probably more than they need to be if we would just remember what Jesus wants of us as described in **Matthew 25: 35 – 40** (CEV) Jesus is talking with his disciples after his resurrection about the Kingdom of God on earth and how that will look. The king says...

'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and

welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' Then the King will say, (*The Message*) 'I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it for me.'

That's a picture of the kind of church that Jesus is talking about and God is dreaming of. Let us pray.

We come before you, Holy Trinity of Love,  
knowing that we sometimes act as if everything we do is just fine.  
And yet you call us to tear away the coverings and to look deeper.  
You challenge us to speak the truth about the walls that divide us  
and the way that we fall short.

Forgive us and open us to your refreshing water of life.  
Help us to create a place in this world that is a sanctuary,  
a refuge from division—a place of prayer and hope.  
Help us to foster the growth of love and peace,  
and move us closer to compassion and courage  
to speak up and stand up for what is right and good. Amen.