

Is tiredness contagious? I mean contagious like a yawn. You see someone looking especially tired or hear the say, "I'm so tired!" and you think to yourself - "Gosh, I feel tired too!" Covid is a pandemic, but sometimes it feels like tiredness is too. The whole world seems to suffer from being chronically tired. And irritable. They seem to go hand in hand, right? When we're tired we feel more irritable? We know that whatever is happening with our bodies affects our moods and mind and vice versa. I've been feeling *more tired* these past couple of weeks. And as I was preparing this message, one reason why I might be feeling this way occurred to me.

Today is the second Sunday in the Christian season of Lent. Lent is the 40 days, not counting Sundays, leading up to Easter. Traditionally this is time reflection, of putting some things away (giving something up) to make room for other things or adding something that's been missing - all in a desire to get closer to God and healthier personally.

For me, I heard through prayer this year that a good practice this Lent would be giving up sugar - I mean extra sugar - like in my coffee - cuz I like a little coffee with my sugar - and sweets, desserts & such - not giving up natural sugars like fruit or carbohydrates.

But I realized, I'm more tired and possibly a little irritable, because I've been experiencing a withdrawal of sorts. I realized it as I pondered our scripture passage for today. We just heard the story of Jesus angrily turning the tables in the temple from the gospel of John. I'm not suggesting Jesus was merely being irritable, in fact I believe it was quite the opposite, he was acting out of a sense of righteous anger, but reading that passage did prompt the thought about myself all the same.

This incident of Jesus in the temple is told in all four of the gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - which is pretty unique. I think

there are only about 10 incidents in Jesus' life recorded in every gospel. The gospel of John records it differently than the other three. Matthew, Mark and Luke, are pretty much the same, which makes sense since they are synoptic, which means seen together - they were written using the same source. And they record this event happening just after Jesus enters Jerusalem the last week of his life. So - later in his ministry.

John's gospel was the only one written independently of Matthew, Mark and Luke and years after them, so it makes sense that it's pretty different. John's gospel records this incident of Jesus driving out the money changers and turning over their tables in the very beginning of Jesus' ministry - right after he turns water into wine at Cana.

Why are they recorded at different times? The NIV study Bible suggests there might have been two different incidents of Jesus chasing out the money changers - or John might have placed the incident at the beginning of his gospel for theological reasons - to show God's judgment through the Messiah from the beginning.

Whatever the case, celebrating the differences, being glad of multiple perspectives actually preserves the truth better. Efforts to harmonize everything into one truth leans more toward the possibility of tampering to architect a single truth. Don't witnesses of the same incident tend to retell it differently because of their own perspectives and memory? We should be encouraged to appreciate each text on its own and take time, in our hurry-up life to sit down, read slowly and listen closely to what's been recorded in the Bible. Every way it's been recorded.

What bubbled up to the surface for me, as I read & pondered this incident written in *each* of the gospels, were the words recorded by Mark - "On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the

temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations, but you have made it a den of robbers."

Though these words are talking about a physical building, the temple in Jerusalem, for me as I read them, they were also saying something to me about my body, the temple of my body where God - the Holy Spirit - dwells with me now that God - Jesus - can no longer be with me on earth.

As it says in I Corinthians: "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, you were bought for a price. So glorify God in your body." I had to ask myself this question - is my body, this temple of the Holy Spirit, more a house of prayer, or a den of thieves?

The idea of a house of prayer is something FAIRLY easy to understand. For me, when I think of this temple, my body, as a house of prayer I see two parts - one is being willing generally to abide in the Spirit. Abide in the Spirit. To kind of have an eye on the Holy Spirit moving throughout my day, leading me to use words and take actions that bring God glory rather than serving myself. Listening for and abiding in the Spirit. Said very simply, taking care of myself in all ways and desiring to be obedient to God.

The second part of being a house of prayer is very specific - to deliberately create time to focus just on God in prayer and meditation. You know that our Muslim friends have built into their discipline praying five, set times a day. It's called "Salat" and is the second Pillar of Islam. They pray at dawn, midday, late

in the afternoon, just after sunset and finally between sunset and midnight. I love this. We might think ourselves more righteous or justified as Christians than our Muslim friends, but how often do WE set aside time to spend with God? Is it even daily? Would you ever consider investing focused time on God five times a day? I wonder how - and how much- doing that could change our lives?

When you think about this phrase, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" - what hits you about that? Does it speak to you about our physical church and people meeting in it and how we treat one another? Or are you thinking about the temple of your body and how it can be a house of prayer? If something comes to you now, go ahead and write it down as I speak. It might be helpful to remember.

The second part of that phrase in Mark's gospel, "but you have made this house a den of robbers", is a little harder to understand than the first part. It's poetic and beautifully written, but what does it really mean for us in 2022?

Some of you know that our congregation is currently going through a Lent study called Entering the Passion of Jesus by Amy-Jill Levine that goes along with this sermon series. This is the second sermon in this series. If you missed the first sermon, you can listen on YouTube or find it on our website under "Sundays" and "Sermon Transcripts".

As I prepared to preach today I resourced the second chapter in our study book by AJ Levine and she made some statements contrary to why I thought Jesus called the temple a den of robbers. To explain it, I need to tell you a little about the original temple in Jerusalem for it to make more sense.

The Jewish Temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' time was a huge, monstrous complex the size of 11 soccer fields put end to end. That's

big. And though, in a way, it was the Jewish equivalent of our “church” it was NOT a quiet, peaceful sanctuary. This monstrous complex, which anyone could enter, was the center and source of community life. It was noisy, crowded, busy and smelly. This isn’t a high quality rendering of what the temple might have looked like and none of the original building is standing now except a portion of the western wall so it’s hard to know exactly how it looked, but the wall surrounding the whole complex created the largest area called the Court of the Gentiles. Gentile means everyone who isn’t Jewish. Here it’s the section around the outside labeled “B”. This Court of Gentiles was an area open to anyone wanting to visit the Temple and was where selling of goods took place. What was being sold and bought? Basically cattle, sheep and doves for different types of sacrifices to God required by Jewish law. This is why it was smelly.

Jewish pilgrims traveling from far away for special feasts like the Passover would never think of bringing their own doves or livestock, because the sacrifice had to be without blemish or spot - it was required to be a perfect offering. A long trip would cause problems for animals - at the least get them dirty or injured, at the worst maim or kill them or they might get stolen. So pilgrims not only bought their sacrifices at the temple, they also had to change their money from the various currencies of the Roman empire where they lived to temple currency called Tyrian shekels. Because there was an image of the Emperor on the Roman coins, the Temple goods had to be bought and sold using Temple shekels instead of Roman money.

I was taught in seminary that, because the money changers and sellers charged an exorbitant fee for all of this - they were cheating the people - this was the reason Jesus angrily tossed them out for their “thievery” and turned

over the tables. AJ Levine, however, as a New Testament historical scholar, writes that Jesus says nothing about the Temple exploiting the population. In fact, there is no indication anywhere that the vendors were overcharging in the necessary selling of goods. The people wouldn’t have stood for it. So what did Jesus mean that the Temple was a den of thieves or robbers?

Think of it this way... a den of thieves is not where robbers rob. A den of thieves is a place they go after they rob to count their spoils and delight in it. AJ Levine writes, “Some people in Jeremiah’s time, at the time of Jesus, and some people today, take divine mercy for granted and see worship as an opportunity to show off new clothes rather than recommit to clothing the naked. The present-day comparison to what Jeremiah, and Jesus, condemned is easy to make. The church member sins during the workweek, either by doing what is wrong or by failing to do what is right. Then on Sunday morning this same individual, perhaps convinced of personal righteousness, heartily sings the hymns, happily greets everyone and generously puts a fifty-dollar bill in the collection plate. That makes the church a den of robbers. A safe place for those who are not truly repentant and who do not truly follow what Jesus asks.”

Ouch. That hit home.

I had to ask myself, in what ways am I failing to do what’s right in the world and then, convinced of my personal righteousness, celebrating in my “goodness” as I worship on Sundays. It’s a worthy question to ponder prayerfully. A few thoughts came to mind for me - one of them having to do with my Lenten fast I experienced last year. Last year I gave up screen time watching TV or movies. I’d watch if the family were going to watch something together as a family activity, but I refrained from turning to the screen to fill my time or to “check out”.

For me, when I stopped turning to the screen in my down time, an interesting thing happened. My family started talking more and spending more time together.

True story. One evening last year, when we all had different schedules and hadn't eaten dinner together, I made a plate of food for myself when I got home from work and I sat at the dining room table with a book to read, figuring everyone else had eaten and were busy. Mind you, we did try to keep our dining room table clear of "stuff" and used it mainly for eating and not as a catch all, so that was helpful to begin with. Well, I hadn't been sitting longer than a few minutes when my husband, Mark, wandered over from his computer and sat down next to me, and started talking, though he'd already eaten. Then in a matter of minutes my 19 year old son, who'd been watching tv in another room, but hadn't eaten yet (which I hadn't realized), came into the kitchen, made his own dinner and instead of going back to the tv, because he saw my husband and I sitting and talking, he sat down with us too and for at least 30 minutes, probably more, we sat in each other's company and reconnected. That, to me, was like gold. Experiencing that Lenten fast helped me see what I was failing to do right in the world. I had been allowing screen time to disconnect me from those actually present and most important in my life.

The question remains for us today. How can we make this temple - whether this church or our bodies - how can we make this temple a house of prayer instead of a den of robbers? What are we failing to do right in the world? How is God calling us toward transformation today?

I think this phrase in Psalm 51, wraps it up nicely for us. "You, O God, do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you, O God, do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of

God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."