

Prayer: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations... (Peace of drawing close to you)

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock and redeemer of us all. Amen.

Good Morning! Peace be with you! How is it with your soul? It is well with my soul.

The story of Jesus' response to the temple being made into a marketplace was remarkable...it is found in all four gospels! In addition, it was another step toward his arrest, unjust trial, suffering and death on the cross. Jesus refers to raising up a new temple in three days — something his disciples later remembered as a foretelling of his resurrection. How might we raise up as the Body of Christ and be a holy temple — a holy dwelling place of God — in the world?

Let's begin with prayer. *God of restoration and rebuilding, we are here today seeking resurrection and renewal for our tired and worn-out bodies and the body of this community. God you call us to small acts of transformation but not perfection. As we continue to be aware of your presence on this Lenten journey, keep nudging us to listen carefully for what's up. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight, you who are rock, redeemer, and Renewer of us all. Amen.*

You may recognize those last words of the Prayer for illumination. Nancy shared them with us as she read from Psalm 19. This verse closes the psalm of praise to God as creator of all that is and as provider of the life-giving gift of the law. To be clear, there are not just 10 commandments, but 613 *mitzvot* (*commandments*). Christians focus on the 10, but must remember they are only a part of Torah, which are 'instruction' for patterns of respect and relationship with God, family, and others.

Interestingly, verse 14, '*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight*', is referring to the previous verses seeking 'blamelessness' and innocence of 'great transgression', in other words, to be found perfect, and without sin.

Friends, Perfection is impossible. And yet, we often find ourselves trying to live up to unattainable expectations set by ourselves, by others, or by culture. We see our need for perfection come out in the way we treat our bodies, our grades, our careers, our relationships, our families, our legacy, and even our places of worship and community.

We try to keep up an impossible pace as we strive toward perfection, productivity, and accomplishments. Think about it... the stress in striving is a key factor in mental health issues across the age groups. As Christians, we keep striving to outgrow our imperfect selves. As humans, we hope to live into our New Year's resolutions longer this year than last year.

Right about now you may be wondering...why is Pastor Pat talking about perfection? Here's why (in short)... the whole temple issue is related to being perfect...having a perfect, unblemished sacrifice because humans are not perfect and needed to make atonement & be purified according to Torah. This was especially true for the major festivals and holy days, including Passover.

Jesus had been an observant Jew throughout his life. He understood the customs of the temple and its sacrifices (Lev 1, 3) and offerings (Matt 22:15-22). Further, Jesus understood the history of the temple as the place where people could be in the presence of God (1 Kings 8).

When Jesus entered the temple and turned it upside down, he was making a clear and radical statement about the injustice of what was happening and revealing just who he was. By throwing coins on the ground, driving the animals out, and pushing over the moneylenders' tables, he was saying, "Folks, you've got this all wrong. It's completely backward. It should be God first, not your profit margin. This temple isn't for meeting customers, it's for meeting God."

Jesus' anger and frustration came not from the actual customs of the Jewish tradition (he had always participated in these practices), but from the way people were twisting these practices to keep people from God's presence and turn a profit.

No one should have the power to control or dictate God's presence and blessings to reach the children of God. No one should be blocked from the revelation of God because of money, customs, or religious orders.

Jesus physically showed them what needed to go—all the trappings of commerce, the noise and the bustle that had taken over the space meant to be dedicated to God.

When we make room in our hearts and minds for the presence of God, little by little God’s love and goodness start to change us. Our bodies become temples for the Spirit, and, somehow, we are transformed— though we might not notice it happening in an instant. We become a new creation, sharing love, hope, kindness, and goodness to the world.

When the religious leaders asked Jesus why he thought he could just barge in and wreck the place, Jesus gave them a strange answer. He said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” He was talking about his own body, his rising from death to life after three days. And only God could do such a thing.

This is the ultimate truth that shows us nothing is too far gone for God to transform. God’s victory over death was a gift to each of us, a sign that nothing can separate us from God’s presence.

So that is why in John 2:21, Jesus’ words speak of the temple of his body where the presence of God now dwells. Today, we believe that God has given us the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1-2), and now our bodies have become the temple where God dwells.

You might feel discouraged that things haven’t changed as much as you had hoped— things within yourself or in others who are important people in your life. Let me offer two things. First, Hear these words of writer Anne Lamott: **It’s in the encounter with God where change begins, where grace begins to find its way into the depths of all that we are; right where we are. “That’s transformation ...that grace meets us exactly where we are. And it doesn’t leave us where it found us.”** Second, take this song with you.

**When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until You come and sit awhile with me**

**You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas
I am strong, when I am on Your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be**

May it be so. Amen.

Now, Let us look **to Nancy Janson** who will lead us in the prayer for God’s people.

Response to the Word –**Pastor Pat**

Let's join together in a response to the Word – Lenten Blessing for Transformation

Public theologian **Kate Bowler shares a** blessing for this day.

Note: There is a beautiful poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins called "God's Grandeur" that you might love too. We were especially inspired after reading it, which you'll be able to see below. But check out the original too

A Lenten Blessing for Transformation

You got it right, as poets do
Mr. Gerard Manley Hopkins,
you with the whimsical name
and the solemn truth, that

"The world is charged with the grandeur of God,
It will flame out like shining from shook foil."

And that despite all that humans are and do
"There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

And it calls to us.
It speaks a wisdom that shines through the cracks
of all that is broken, all that is incomplete,
a beauty so strong that it calls to us
saying, "Come!
All is prepared. The table is ready."

Here is the food that will sustain you,
the peace that will settle you and strengthen you
and make you able to do the next small
and loving thing.

We can't change the world.
But we can come near to you, O God,
and become those who are willing to receive,
and be changed.
Amen.