

Sermons'16.1      **GOT JUNK?**

*"He (Jesus) found the Temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength." John 2:14 The Message*

Unless I miss my guess, in most every marriage, at least one of the partners or members of the household lives by the motto: "Keep it. You might need it sometime." Guess which one I am! This immediately sets up an ongoing struggle with the other who can't stand disorder in any room.

If you are a saver and want to be released from bondage to the junk in order to keep peace in the house, there are these blue "Got Junk" trucks who will help transport the stuff to the consignment store or the dump. And if you haven't been able to kick the habit cold turkey yourself, you can hire people who will come in and help you de-clutter the place. They will help rescue you from junk.

As a born saver, I confess to feeling rescued, a certain lightness of being, on those all too rare occasions when I have unload some of my stuff. I saw this from the other side last fall, when having gone through the pain of being willing to part with a bunch of clutter, I asked a buddy with a pick-up truck to help me get it to the dump, only to see him setting aside a number of things which did not go to the dump but which went home to his garage! When will I ever learn, how good it feels to get rid of junk...to be uncluttered. You feel better because the junk has likely gotten in the way of the important stuff. When you let it go you are released to focus on what is truly important.

**First, if we want to rid ourselves of clutter, we must identify it.** “He (Jesus) found the temple teeming with people selling cattle and sheep and doves. The loan sharks were also there in full strength.” (John 2:14)

Jesus realized that the Temple laws and sacrificial system, with those selling animals for sacrifice, initially provided a helpful convenience. Picture trying to travel in those days. There were no Hampton Inns to accommodate you upon arrival so you had to drag bed rolls along, no MacDonalds on every other corner, so you packed bread and dried fish. Plus you not only had wife and kids and immediate family, but your sisters and your cousins and your aunts. Not having to drag along a poor doomed farm animal was most helpful. The temple merchants solved that problem ... for a price of course. A price which escalated each year of course. On top of that, you couldn't use Roman coins inside The Temple. You had to go through a currency exchange aisle, where exchange rates were becoming outrageous.

So these layers of clutter ended up being unjust, unfair to the faithful merely seeking to worship the God they loved and served. No wonder Jesus became angry...justly angry.

Jesus understood that spiritual junk can hide or misguide our worship, our faith. It can decay our souls from the inside out. A bunch of clutter... of unnecessary, perhaps even originally well-intentioned acts and rules, can become barriers to a vital personal relationship to God. Clutter often gets in the way of the important stuff. So in order for the Temple to lead people in vital worship of the living God, the Temple had to be cleared/cleansed of a lot of unnecessary junk that was getting in the way of the joy of worship, and the release and

freedom from the burden and clutter of sin. So in cleansing of the Temple, Jesus cleared away the spiritual junk of the sacrificial system, livestock merchants and the loan sharks with their visible, physical barriers to worship, so that God's people could experience spiritual stuff we can't see.. God's living, merciful presence in the life of the faith community and in our personal lives.

Jesus gives himself as the **new temple**, and the new interpreter of Scripture. For all of the sacrificial regulations were originally based on the Hebrew Scripture. Jesus is saying: get rid of this layer upon layer of regulation that are keeping people from true worship.

The Temple and its ritualistic practices were quite visible. But the God in whose honor the Temple was built, was not visible. In the center of the Temple was the most sacred curtained off spot...the Holy of Holies...which the High Priest entered annually. And what was in that spot...a box with handles...the Ark of the Covenant, and inside that except for a bench, there was nothing! The Holiest place in their world was empty! Uncluttered! No junk. As the Scripture says: "God is spirit, and those who worship Him, must worship Him in Spirit and in truth." To get rid of the clutter, to get to that unclutter center, we must first, identify the junk.

**Second, we must realize the need to actually remove the junk.**

*(Jesus: "Get your things out of here!" John 2:16)*

This is a tough task for the church of our day, as much as it was for the Temple...the church of Jesus' day.

The Temple elders who oversaw the attendance figures and offerings on the Sabbath didn't want to risk changing that, just so people could worship and serve the living God in spirit and in truth. Sadly throughout history the Christian successor to the Temple, the Church of Jesus Christ has allowed a similar thing to happen. Questionable interpretations of Scripture leading to written rules and

unwritten but firmly accepted practices have made worship of the one true living God difficult or impossible for all too many of God's children.

I personally know some homosexual brothers and sisters in the church who attend regularly, give of their money and service but whose lives are saddened at the least or miserable at worst because of some of our denominational positions and the attitudes of some Christians toward them. They tell me they feel like they are never fully welcomed nor affirmed as part of our fellowship. I think that is because we haven't removed our junk and released them.

Might Jesus be saying to us, **myself included**, whose first instinct is to hang onto our foolish phobias and foundless fears: "Get **your** things out of here!" Make room for **my** things. ..God's things. true worship & fellowship in spirit and in truth. In that one place where we say we are doing that."

Diane was one of the early (though by no means among the first) women ordained. It was not all easy for her. Parishioners and male clergy, had to hear the challenging words of Jesus: "Get **your** things out of here. Make room for **my** things... both men and women are created in the image of God."

Rev. Harold Bell, was one of the first black pastors appointed to a white congregation in our conference. It wasn't easy for him. "Get your prejudiced things out of here; make room for **my** things: "There is Jew nor Greek, slave nor free..."

My mother's people are Mennonites, who were persecuted in Germany and Switzerland by both the Catholic and Reformed Churches because they refused to baptize infants. They became refugees, some to Russia where Catherine the Great protected them, and others, my ancestor John Wadel fled to Penn'sWoods. "Get your own petty things out of here." One of Jesus' best stories is about a guy who interpreted faith in God a little differently...remember that Good Samaritan?

And what about other areas of our personal lives? Have we have allowed layer upon layer of things/physical stuff/junk we can see, to be a barrier, keeping us from nurturing that which we cannot see. It's not easy. We live in a culture that glorifies stuff. Those of you who have seen my garage with

it's antique roadster and all manner of tools to maintain it, and my basement with many electric trains running around, know that I like stuff. I mean I struggled over my junk list for my friend to take to the dump (and his garage.) Aren't we encouraged to invest so much money and so much effort and time in acquiring and maintaining our stuff, we barely have the 3 minutes it takes to read the daily Bible verse and reflection in the Upper Room. What keeps us from being rescued?.. saved from our stuff?

So, *first* we need to identify the junk, *second* we need to realize we actually need to remove it..not keep hoarding it...and **third we need to admit we need help in getting rid of it.** This is what we mean when we affirm that **Jesus Christ is our Savior.** If we are saved, that means we are rescued from something that overwhelms us, some situation or condition from which we can't get out of on our own. Some sinful pattern of behavior hurtful to ourselves...hurtful to our brothers and sisters. We need help. Folks, this junk we hang onto is dangerous stuff. It keeps us from the really important stuff...God's peace in our hearts, love, care for our family, our friends, our neighbors...all God's children...

**The way to be rescued from the junk.** *"Tear down this temple, and in three days I'll put it back together. ..But Jesus was talking about his body as the Temple. Later, after he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered he had said this."* John2:22.

As the woman in the video slowly realized, she was being rescued from all (the junk) that kept her from God. Jesus is himself the Rescuer, the Save-ior, the source of courage and strength, to remove all that we have allowed to clutter our lives. So give us Jesus to help us get rid of all the \ junk that has become barriers to a vital personal , and eternal relationship with God, and which keeps us from the great delight of enjoying kindly fellowship with all God's children.

**"Give me Jesus. You can have all the rest, give me Jesus."** When I am alone...when I come to die... when I want to sing... **give me Jesus.** (African-American Spiritual)

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Sadly it seems to me that all too many branches of Christ's church, including my own beloved denomination is guilty of the same hypocrisy by refusing to marry and ordain our LGBT brothers and sisters in Christ. We worry that attendance and finance figures will plummet, so we avoid changing our Book of Discipline to reflect their full inclusion in the life and ministry of the United Methodist Church. Have our fears and phobias, and our unloving, un-Christlike interpretations of Scripture become religious stuff...spiritual junk that hinders the ultimate growth of the church and puts our own souls in peril. Are those ancient words of our Master directed to us today? "Get your things out of here!" Friends, It's not easy to face up to. I must admit my own struggle over this issue; I have often waived in my own clear position, and only recently decisively concluded that all along Jesus, on the basis of God's love, has always wanted us to change, and become fully inclusive.