

3 Lent
March 4, 2018
Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's
Exodus 20:1-17
1 Cor 1:18-25
John 2:13-22

Cursillo begins its 3 ½ days of teaching by offering the concept that we all live by an ideal. Our ideal is the combination of ideas, hopes, and preferences that inspire us and motivate us. Our ideal shapes our whole life. It makes us who we are. What is your ideal?

I very clearly remember my first formed thought of an ideal – but I didn't know that was the name to give it. At high school age I wanted to find a girl whose life I could make better because I would be in it; and who would make my life better because she was in mine.

Years later God had led me to Ruth, and we were married, and we had two daughters. My ideal expanded. I wanted to be the best parent I could possibly be to my kids.

Only a few years later, my ideal expanded again. It didn't replace any of the other goals, but I learned about a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. And my ideal became one of living for God in the way I did all of the other things.

Jesus lost his temper when he walked into the temple courts in Jerusalem. That magnificent structure was understood by Jews to be the center point of God's presence on earth. Every Jewish male, living anywhere in the world, was expected to make the journey to the Jerusalem Temple at least once every 2 or 3 years, to take part in one of the major festival celebrations. The setting for today's Gospel reading is the Feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread. It was a huge feast, lasting eight days. Jerusalem was filled with Jews from all over the world. These visitors from out of town needed to buy the animals for sacrifice at the Temple. Even locals would have to buy new animals if the priests decided that their animals were unacceptable for sacrifice because of any imperfections. The Temple tax had to be paid. The Temple priests provided moneychangers who would exchange foreign currency for temple currency, which by regulation could not have the image of any person or animal on it. It was a hectic scene of strangers, animal cages, merchant's tables, money being exchanged, and people pushing through the confusion to get through the Court of the Gentiles into the Temple to worship. It was into that scene that Jesus came, on his own pilgrimage to the Temple.

The sale of animals and the changing of money were necessary systems to support Temple worship. The sacrifice of animals was required for burnt offerings in the Temple (Leviticus 1 and 3); and the Temple tax could not be paid in Greek or Roman coinage because of the human image on those coins.

Jesus was not just challenging the abuses of these systems, but he was confronting the system itself. He was attacking the institutional church's system that had become so ingrained in its own rules and practices that it was no longer open to a fresh revelation from God. **The ideal of the institutional church was to maintain itself.**

Jesus' disciples recalled the reading from Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for your house will consume me." That was David writing about his zeal for God. Jesus' response to what he saw happening in the temple courtyard was driven by his zeal for God. His life was driven by his zeal for God. His ideal was to live for God.

John's Gospel says that Jesus became the new presence of God on earth; the new 'temple'. John 2:21, "²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body."

Paul said, "Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified." Through our faith in Jesus, he offers his Spirit to dwell in us. Scripture describes us as member of Christ's mystical body.

1 Peter 2:5, "⁵ you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

1 Cor 3:16, "¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?"

Through our baptism, and our conscious decision to invite Him to be the Master of our life, WE are now the temple of God's presence.

How does this story of Jesus' zeal for God challenge you and me in our practices at St Luke's? If our goal is NOT to maintain the institutional church, but to be the Body of Christ in this place, what ideal do we live by? For St Luke's that ideal is documented in our Mission Statement. Let's read it together (from bulletin).

What ideal do you live by? Give it some thought this week.

I pray that this faith community is a place that produces a zeal to live for God.
Amen.