

Any Auburn fans in the room? After getting decked in the face by his own basketball coach, #1—Jared Harper—must've been wondering just what he had done to deserve it. *I've been playing hard*, he must've thought, *been giving it my all, then—BAM!* Turns out, during a game against LSU in late January, Auburn basketball coach Bruce Pearl was getting a little excited on the sidelines, when Harper happened to be walking behind him. Well, apparently Pearl got a little too excited because BOOM! he threw a stray punch that hit Harper square in the jaw, leaving him stunned. Whoops!

Or maybe you remember one of Rasheed Wallace's finest moments. Back in 2010, when Wallace used to play for the pro-basketball team the Boston Celtics, Wallace went up for a defensive rebound and things quickly took a turn for the worse. Normally, with a rebound, you grab the ball and take it back down court away from your own basket to go score on the other team. But this just must not have been Wallace's day, because instead the ball bounced off his fingers and went SWISH! into his own net. It would've been a beautiful shot, had it not given the opposing team a three-point lead in the fourth quarter. Whoops again!

Is that something like what's going on with Jesus today? I mean, it sure looks like He's made some sort of mistake. Going into the temple of His own God and making a mess of the place—kicking over tables and dumping out coins. Braiding together a whip and lashing out against His own people—Jews just like Him. What other explanation is there than that He got His wires crossed, accidentally thought this was a sorta pagan temple, dedicated to some idol. That's the only way to make any sense of it, right? After all, why else would Jesus be playing against His own team?

But strangely, Jesus never snaps out of it. He never calms down, takes a deep breath, looks around and sees that He's goofed up. Jesus never turns red, never seems embarrassed, never says nervously, "Whoops, sorry guys. Wrong address." He never does that—so, what possible explanation is there?

No, this is definitely no Whoops! Jesus' Bruce Lee roundhouse kicks and Jean-Claude Van Damme karate chops are definitely deliberate. But what might make it even more confusing is how all this activity going on at the temple in today's Gospel seems to be ordained by God. After all, didn't He command such sacrifices—oxen and sheep and pigeons—to be offered in His temple? If we read the books of the Old Testament, don't we see it all right there in black and white? Wouldn't any Jew worth his salt conclude that if they didn't offer up such sacrifices that they'd instead be *disobeying* God's command? So, what's going on here? After Jesus' tantrum today, we're left wondering just whose team is Jesus on anyway.

Well, let's hit the instant replay, 'cuz in doing so we'll hear Jesus explain Himself a little. When Jesus comes storming into the place, we hear Him shout at the merchants and moneychangers—"Get this stuff outta here! Don't make my Father's house into a mini mall!" And with that, we discover what it is exactly that has gotten under His skin—it's not the fact that sacrifices were being made, but that such sacrifices had become big business. These sacrifices were supposed to be about God, but men had quickly made it all about money. Sadly, these entrepreneurs had turned the Lord into a get-rich-quick scheme. They were exploiting Him as a way to line their own pockets. And maybe now, it's starting to make a bit more sense.

But while that explains why Jesus might've chased out the crooks, it still doesn't explain why He'd drive all of them out—meaning even the animals, as John the Gospel-writer tells us happened. Those animals seemed to belong in the temple, they were needed for sacrifices. But look again at the first sentence, and we come to learn this all takes place when "The Passover of the Jews was at hand". Now, that's important, because it puts this whole scene into context. The Passover was the start of the Exodus, God's mighty deliverance of His people from Egypt—what would eventually become known to the Jews as His greatest act of salvation for them. And as they're getting ready to commemorate this special occasion, it sure seems as if the people might have things backwards.

God was the one doing the saving—not the people. And with each Passover Lamb, it was to be a yearly reminder to them of how God had provided a substitute in their place—a lamb who would die on their behalf—so that the angel of

death would pass over their house. But now, they strangely seemed to have it all turned around. Again, the problem wasn't necessarily with the sacrifices, but that the people were somehow taking credit for them, thinking that their offerings of lambs could appease God. That instead of needing Him to save them, they thought they could save themselves. And maybe by now, it's making a lot more sense why Jesus might go in and set the record straight.

No doubt, zeal for His Father's house consumed Jesus—He was definitely on God's team. And while no Asherah Poles had been erected or any baals were set up in the Lord's temple, there were still other idols that needed to be thrown out of there. For example, money and the desire for worldly gain had intruded and set up shop. But also the people's faith in themselves, that they could be their own savior, was idolatry in the eyes of the Lord. So, along comes Jesus with a whip in hand, pouring out money, and shouting at them—all in an effort to come in and clean house.

Boy, that's too bad for them and all. But this has nothing to do with us, right? You and I, we're safe and secure, aren't we? We're at a nice distance from Jerusalem. This whole episode is about two thousand years behind us. None of us have to worry about this ever hitting home, do we? Or *do we*?

See, speaking of temples, the Bible calls each one of us a "temple of the Holy Spirit." Every person in this room is a place where God is pleased to dwell. He's taken up residence in us, makes His home with us. But do we need any cleansing? Have we filled up the Lord's house with any idols of our own? What's been taking His place in your heart—what else have you been clinging onto for dear life? *God* knows we need cleansing—*do we*?

So, lookout! Here comes Jesus! He's got the whip of His Holy Law in one hand—with the other hand, He's dumping out and exposing our idols for what they are—at the top of His lungs He's shouting at us to drop to our knees and repent. And after the dust settles this morning and we're left nursing our wounds, like the Jews, we might be wondering just whose side is Jesus on anyway? I mean, it's no fun to have Him come in and rearrange the furniture, is it, to have Him shake up our lives and rattle us like that!

There it was, final quarter. The whole game, I barely got a pass to me. My own teammates, acted like they weren't even on my team. I was open—at least, so I thought. I had a good shot at the hoop—or so I thought. I was ready, all set up to score—well, that's what I thought. But, after being overlooked time and time again, I kept feeling hurt, betrayed, cheated. Were we all on the same team, or not?

Looking back, hindsight is 20/20. I thought I was open, but I wasn't. I thought I had a good angle at the basket, but I didn't. I thought I was prepared to take us to victory, but I couldn't. As it turned out, it was *I* who wasn't the best team player. But as hard as it was to be overlooked like that, it was a good thing. Because the passes went to the best guys who were actually open and were all lined up to shoot, they made the baskets—one after another. Thanks to them, I got to be part of a winning team. That never would've happened otherwise.

It might be difficult to understand why Jesus would come and do a spring cleaning on us. It's painful to 'fess up and admit the truth about ourselves. It can hurt to see our false gods go packing. The whole process, what we call repentance, rarely is much fun. But like the Jews in the temple this morning, would Jesus really love us if He didn't? If He just let things go on as they were, didn't take drastic measures into His own hands, just *whose* team would He be on then?

This morning, as we're asking the same thing as the Jews, "Jesus, just what business do you have coming in here and acting like a bull in a china shop? Just what gives you the right?" Jesus' non sequitur answer to them is the same for us, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." "But it's taken forty-six years to build this temple," we stammer, "how will you raise it up in three days?" And John lets us readers in on a little secret—"He was speaking about the temple of His body. And when Jesus was raised from the dead, His disciples finally got it."

See, Jesus is getting everyone ready—us included—for something much, much better than we could ever imagine. God's got something so amazing cooked up for us that it beats any idol any day. He's got the greatest act of salvation the world could ever know coming our way—something even better than the Passover! And cleaning house, Jesus is preparing us for this full and free saving from God.

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Third Sunday in Lent
John 2:13-22

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There's a sacrifice to be made, yes, but one that's for all peoples of all times. It's more than enough to cover the sins of the whole world. And it's a once-and-for-all offering, never to be repeated again. When is it, where is it, you ask? Right there, in the temple of Jesus' own body.

Offering up a sacrifice in His temple on the cross, it is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Taking our place, being our substitute, Jesus' temple is desecrated and destroyed for us. And the temples of our bodies, are maintained, kept intact—our sins are forgiven, eternal death and hell pass over us. His temple runs red with His own blood, so that ours can be sanctified by that same blood. Thanks to Jesus, you and I are on the winning team—when His temple is raised, He leads us to victory!

But don't look now—in just a few moments, “The Passover of the Jews will [once more] be at hand.” It will be time again to celebrate the Last Supper, the Paschal feast, what we more often call Holy Communion. Yet again, Jesus will pay us a visit—and if we're cringing at the thought, preparing ourselves for some more reorganization, don't forget, He's on our team! In fact, there's no whip in His hand anymore, just His true body scourged for you. He's not pouring out any money bags, but gives you the very blood which has been poured out for many. And He isn't doing any shouting, but speaks gently—“Take, eat,” He says, “Take, drink . . . this is given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.”

As God returns to His temple—you—in the person of Jesus, He takes His rightful place. He makes your heart His Holy of Holies, and there He sits enthroned in mercy. Full of grace and love, He is for you and never against you. As you eat and drink His Holy body and blood, He comes under your roof, and makes Himself at home.

Now, I'm not going to say that from now on life is gonna be all roses. But what this does mean, is that no matter how things look—Jesus is always on your team! And even if the day comes when your temple is destroyed, remember, He's been known to raise it up again!