

**EXEGESIS—EB15**  
**Third Sunday of Lent**  
**March 7, 2021**

**Gospel:** John 2:13-25

**Theme:** **Serving God by serving our neighbor in our daily, mundane lives.**

Since the Passover of the Jews was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as the money-changers seated there. He made a whip out of cords and drove them all out of the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables, and to those who sold doves he said, "Take these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disciples recalled the words of Scripture, "Zeal for your house will consume me." At this the Jews answered and said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this? Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and you will raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking about the temple of his body. Therefore, when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they came to believe the scripture and the word Jesus had spoken. While he was in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, many began to believe in his name when they saw the signs he was doing. But Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature. He himself understood it well.

1. **Question:** Why does John the Evangelist place this story at the beginning of his gospel while the other evangelists put it at the end of their texts?
2. **Question:** How else does John's account differ from the synoptics? What is he really announcing here?
3. **Question:** How do many folks today view church attendance? What is missing?
4. **Question:** How might we have confused people about where to meet Christ?
5. **Question:** What is another way we might explain this phenomenon and fix it?
6. **Question:** What are practical steps we might take to change this direction?
7. **Question:** What is an alternate way to help our parishioners see God at work in everyday life?
8. **Question:** How can a Christian deal with the cultural mindsets of postmodernism, secularism and pluralism to bring unbelievers, Nones, to faith?

**Q1.** Why? Because of distinct theological agendas. **Keep in mind that the Gospels are confessions of faith from the first century** rather than historical accounts of the twenty-first century. So each difference provides us with a clue to the distinct confession of faith the particular evangelist offers. In this case, the synoptic writers cast the disruption in the Temple as the final provocative act of Jesus that precipitates his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. John, however, uses this same scene to announce the inauguration of a new era, one in which the grace of God is no longer mediated or accessed through cultic sacrifice, but instead is available to all who receive Jesus as God's Messiah. [David Lose at: <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/lent-3-b-igniting-centrifugal-force/>]

**Q2.** Notice, for instance, that not only the timing of Jesus' actions is different in John, but so is the accusation he levels at the moneychangers. Rather than accuse them of turning the Temple into a "den of robbers" – accusing them, that is, of **defrauding the poor** – Jesus instead says they have turned the Temple into a market place. Ironically, however, the

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Temple had to be a market place – or at least have a market place – so as to enable devout Jews to purchase animals for sacrifice and to change the Imperial coin for the local currency with which to make such purchases. So when Jesus drives the animals out of the Temple, overturns the tables of the moneychangers, and demands the end of buying and selling, **he is really announcing the end of this way of relating to God.**

God is no longer available primarily, let alone exclusively, via the Temple. Instead, as John confesses in the opening verses of his account, Jesus invites us to experience God's grace upon grace (1:17) through our faith in him. Given that John's account was written well after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the Romans, his insistence – and perhaps reassurance – to his community that **they would find God's mercy in Christ outside rather than inside the Temple** makes practical as well as theological sense. And, to tell you the truth, I think it has the same potential today. [Ibid, David Lose]

**Q3.** Many of our people, I suspect, **tend to think of church as a destination.** It's a place you go to receive...well, spiritual things (actually, it'd be interesting to ask people what they expect to receive at church, but that's probably another sermon!). But, taking a cue from John, **I wonder if we've got things a little backwards.** Don't get me wrong, I think worship is important. But rather than imagine it's a place we *go to* for some experience of God, I wonder if we shouldn't imagine it as **a place we're sent from in order to meet, and partner with, God in everyday life.**

C. S. Lewis' third book of his Narnia series, **The Voyage of the 'Dawn Treader'**, provides a wonderful illustration of what I'm talking about. If you remember, in **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe**, the four Pevensie children travel from war-torn London to Narnia and there meet the great lion (and Christ-figure), Aslan, and with his help defeat the White Witch who holds Narnia captive in a perpetual winter. In the second book, the children travel back to assist Prince Caspian in obtaining his rightful throne, and at the end of that book Aslan tells the two older children, Peter and Susan, that they will not return to Narnia.

Now, at the end of the third book, Aslan meets Lucy and Edmund at the edge of the Eastern Sea and tells them the same, that this will be their last trip to Narnia. Lucy is distraught at the prospect of not seeing the beloved lion again, but **he reassures her that she will see him in her own world.** When she is surprised that Aslan is present in her world, he tells her that the whole reason for bringing her to Narnia for a time was so that, coming to know him well here, she would recognize him more easily there. **Isn't that a great image for church?**

We come to church because in the proclamation of the Gospel and sharing of the sacraments we perceive God's grace most clearly. **But then we are sent out to look for God and, even more, to partner with God in our various roles and venues to love and bless the people and world God loves so much.**

But I'm not sure how many of our people see church that way. Or, more accurately, I'm not sure they see their homes, places of work, school, and other parts of their lives as places where God is present, let alone at work through them for the sake of the world. And I think we may have unintentionally contributed to this confusion. Let me explain. [Ibid, David Lose]

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**Q4.** David Miller, at the beginning of his book, *God at Work*, describes an exercise he often does with groups of clergy. *How many of you*, Miller typically asks, *at the beginning of a new program and school year recognize Sunday School teachers, inviting them to stand, “installing” them, and/or praying for them?* All the hands in the room go up. *And how many of you*, he continues, *after your annual meeting and election of new church council (or Board of Elders or Vestry) members, recognize them during worship, “installing” or “consecrating” them and/or praying for them.* Again, almost all the hands go up.

*What about our youth?* Miller goes on. *When your youth group goes on a mission trip, how many of you commission them before they go or pray for them while they are away?* By this time, of course, the response is predictable, as most of the hands are raised. *One more question*, Miller then says. ***How many of you, come late March or early April, invite all of our Certified Public Accountants to stand and pray for them, knowing that for the next several weeks they will work seventy hours or more and that their labor keeps our tax system and government functioning?*** And now there are almost no hands raised in the air.

Do you see what I mean? **By regularly emphasizing the roles we play at church, we unintentionally undervalue all the other roles of our lives and lift up church as the one place where we meet God and live our religious lives** and in this way, I think, undermine John’s insight and confession that **God is out in the world waiting for us to partner with him.** [Ibid, David Lose]

**Q5.** Allow one more way to get at this. When I was in junior high school, I remember learning about the difference between centripetal and centrifugal force. Centripetal force is what pulls objects toward the middle, whereas centrifugal force sends things to the outside (it’s that force that keeps you, for instance, plastered to the wall of the spinning amusement park ride so you don’t fall when it tilts one way or another). **I think our congregational life, Dear Partner, is dominated by centripetal force and I’d like us to work to change it to centrifugal, so that while people do indeed come to church to experience God, that experience and the clearer picture they gain of God from it, end up sending our people back out into the world to serve God by serving neighbor in the various vocational arenas of their life.** [Ibid, David Lose]

**Q6.** And **you could help move us to such centrifugal force** in at least two easy ways this week. **First**, after opening up John’s confession, you could begin **lifting up one vocational arena in the prayers** and commit to doing that each and every week. (If you do so, keep in mind that **vocation includes, but also goes beyond, occupation to include school, home, and places of volunteering and recreation.**)

During the prayers, you could then pray that when we are in those ordinary places this week **we will look for, see, and partner with the God we have heard about in John’s Gospel** reading and our worship this morning. It’s one small step, I know, but if even a few people leave church looking for God in their everyday lives I think it would be totally worth it. Thanks so much, Dear Partner, for joining me – and John! – in helping people see God’s grace present and manifest to them in their daily lives and in this way more fully claim their baptismal identity as disciples of Jesus. [David Lose at <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/03/lent-3-b-igniting-centrifugal-force/>]

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**Q7. A second suggestion for igniting the power of centrifugal force** would be to pass out 3×5 cards and **have each person write out one place they know they will be this week** and then collect those cards with the offering. During the prayers, **you could then pray that when we are in those ordinary places this week we will look for, see, and partner with the God we have heard about in John's Gospel reading** and our worship this morning. It's one small step, I know, but if even a few people leave church looking for God in their everyday lives I think it would be totally worth it.

Thanks so much, Dear Partner, for joining me – and John! – **in helping people see God's grace present and manifest to them in their daily lives** and in this way more fully claim their baptismal identity as disciples of Jesus. Your preaching makes a difference in helping them be the people God has called them to be. [Ibid, David Lose]

**Q8.** In his book, *Preaching at the Crossroads*, David Lose addresses the trends that have emerged **after modernity's collapse: postmodernism, secularism, and pluralism**. From these trends Lose draws out a central question which in turn is examined across the space of two chapters.

Lose turns first to **postmodernism's withering skepticism** in search of latent expressions of faith. Before preachers can even begin to devise ways of making the truth compelling to their hearers postmodernism confronts them with “a more general attitude of **unrelenting skepticism pervading a number of disciplines concerning the validity of previously held assumptions about the nature, and even existence, of objective truth**” (17). For preachers navigating postmodernism's choppy waters entails setting a course away from “self-evident” truth and towards more generous notions of trust and trustworthiness.

The second section brings **secularism and the eroding sense of transcendence** it brings in its train. Preachers must interpret a culture characterized by a waning sense of transcendence, a situation constrains expressions of hope even as these are desperately needed. Lose transitions from this literary fragment into Harvey Cox's *The Secular City*, observing that “**secularism represents a loss of confidence not in human things but in the divine**” (49). Lose shows that “**secularism is a condition in which both the religious and non-religious find themselves struggling for hope**” (50) This gives preachers the opportunity to show others how Christianity will supply them with the hope for which they crave.

The final section of the book is an examination of pluralism. The first of the two chapters deals with “**digital pluralism**,” a situation supersaturated with options for **identity creation** and truth claims. In this sea of narratives and meaning-making systems, Christian preaching is muted, an indistinct voice among more distinct others. Amid such pressures **preachers must shift preaching's emphasis on declarative and propositional forms to a style that begins with questions** and deploys the biblical narrative as a primary resource for identity construction. Preaching that cuts through the din of digital pluralism requires **careful listening for the unsaid implications of what those on the church's margins are saying that they need**. This practice of listening is always a response to this question: “**What would our church look like if it were the place where people are told they have infinite worth and are invited to join a community of persons devoted to discovering and sharing lives of meaning and purpose?**” (95) [Review of *Preaching at the Crossroads* by Benjamin Anthony at: <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2015/03/01/preaching-at-the-crossroads-review/>]