

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH

Rev. Fred Weimert "That Healing Stream"

April 25, 2010

In the synoptic Gospels...

Matthew, Mark and Luke

Jesus only comes to Jerusalem,
at the end of his life.

for the celebration of Passover...

and shortly after that visit he was crucified.

But as I have told you a number of times before

That's not the way John wanted to remember
either Jesus or Jerusalem...

In John, Jesus is most often in Jerusalem,
and frequently he was there

for the celebration of a major Jewish festival.

And intentionally by doing this Jesus' actions
helped to reinterpret that particular festival
for those who followed Jesus...

We are told in today's gospel reading

that Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem...
at the time of the festival of the Dedication.

This was a minor festival in Jewish tradition,
probably because the festival

was about the rededication of the temple...
and the temple

didn't really exist any more

in John's day

and it still doesn't... today.

The festival of Dedication is celebrated on the 25th of Chislev...

It is an eight day celebration...

probably because of the time required to purify a place...

Today we know this festival as Hanukkah.

For many Jewish people, in America,

Hanukkah, even though it is still a minor festival,

has taken on greater emphasis
 because it parallels
 our Christian Christmas celebration.
 And just as our Christmas celebration has been corrupted
 Hanukkah too has become corrupted
 by our commercialism,
 and has become for some Jewish children
 a festival of gift giving.
 It is also called the festival of Lights...
 and like our Christmas,
 is tied to the winter solstice
 and the rebirth of light.

But originally
 it was a festival about the dedication,
 which is what the word Hanukkah means, dedication...
 The Dedication of Jerusalem's Temple.
 It may have harkened back to Solomon's
 dedication of the first temple,
 but that would have made it
 a more major celebration.

Hanukkah was a minor celebration
 because it wasn't that old in Jesus' day...
 It only dated back to 148 bce...
 to the time of Judas Maccabeus and his brothers,
 and their revolt against the Greeks.
 The story of that revolt and Hanukkah
 are found in the first book of the Maccabees
 which is in the Apocrypha of the Old Testament.
 In the 4th chapter of 1st Maccabees we read:
*"Early in the morning
 on the twenty-fifth day of the ninth month,
 which is the month of Chislev,
 in the one hundred forty-eighth year,
 they rose and offered sacrifice,
 as the law directs,
 on the **new altar** of burnt offering
 that they had built.
 At the very season*

*and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it,
it was dedicated with songs
and harps and lutes and cymbals.” (4: 52-54)*

If you had been listening closely,
you might wonder
“Since this is a new altar...
What had happened to the stones
of the old altar?”

A few verses earlier in the same chapter we were told:

*“and they cleansed the sanctuary
and removed the defiled stones
to an unclean place.
They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering,
which had been profaned.
And they thought it best
to tear it down,
so that it would not be a lasting shame to them
that the Gentiles had defiled it.
So they tore down the altar,
and stored the stones
in a convenient place
on the temple hill
until a prophet should come
to tell what to do with them.”*

You need to know that all wrapped up
in the understanding of Messianism...
at least for a portion of the Jewish population...
is this understanding
that there will be one coming...
a prophet...
maybe a messiah...
Who will know what to do
with these very holy altar stones
which had been horribly desecrated.
Who but the messiah,
could possibly bring holiness out of desecration?

Some Jewish people undoubtedly believed
 this would be one of the questions
 the Messiah would answer.

So it is not surprising to see Jesus
 at the festival of the Dedication,
 walking up on the temple mount
 along the western portico...
 the portico of Solomon...
 being accosted by Jewish people
 who had questions about the Messiah.

John 10: 22-30

At that time the festival of the Dedication took place in Jerusalem.

It was winter,

*and Jesus was walking in the temple,
 in the portico of Solomon.*

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him,

"How long will you keep us in suspense?

***If you are the Messiah,
 tell us plainly."***

Jesus answered,

"I have told you, and you do not believe.

*The works that I do in my Father's name
 testify to me;*

but you do not believe,

because you do not belong to my sheep.

My sheep hear my voice.

I know them,

and they follow me.

I give them eternal life,

and they will never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand.

What my Father has given me is greater than all else,

and no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.

The Father and I are one."

Here ends the reading.

Did you hear the question of these Jewish people?

"How long will you keep us in suspense?

***If you are the Messiah,
 tell us plainly."***

Do you wonder what these people,
 possibly Sadducees,
 wanted Jesus to plainly address.
 Did they want Jesus to tell them
 that he was the messiah?

Do you think it could be
 that they were interested
 in what to do about the defiled altar stones.
 That might prove Jesus to be
 the "Prophet/Messiah"

Do you think that Jesus cared about
 altar stones
 that had been desecrated by gentiles?

In John's Gospel (chapter 2)
 when the temple was cleansed, by Jesus,
 it was done with a whip...
 And the people who were desecrating the temple
 on that day were not gentiles,
 No, the temple was being desecrated by
 people who were selling
 sacrificial animals...
 cattle, sheep, doves...

Selling forgiveness
 to those who could afford to buy it...

That was earlier in his ministry,
 but now we see Jesus,
 again in the temple,
 atop the temple mount...
 somewhere near where
 the defiled stones had been hidden.

and Jesus is talking about shepherds and sheep...
 and they are thinking about sacrificial animals...
 and he is talking about a shepherd
 laying down his life...
 and they are talking about shepherds
 who were lining their pockets...

These people are not going to understand each other...
 Are they?

Are you like me
 in that when you meet someone
 who speaks another language,
 that you start talking slower and louder,
 as if that is going to make
 what you are saying in English
 absolutely clear
 to someone who only speaks Spanish.

Judy and I are planning to go to Europe again this summer
 to Austria and Italy...
 Two countries which speak languages
 totally foreign to me.
 And I will be speaking slowly and loudly,
 and I am certain the people of those countries
 will be saying...
 in those phrases
 I won't be able to find
 in my phrase books...
 "Why do Americans talk so loud
 and slowly?"

When you are speaking in different language from others
 there will not be understanding.
 When you are talking about something
 that is of no interest to the one you are talking to
 there will likewise be no understanding.

It is frustrating trying to build the Church up today...
 because the world isn't listening for
 what we are talking about...
 And maybe we aren't talking about the right things...
 We are talking about preserving
 bricks and mortar...
 sacred stones...
 while they may be more concerned with preserving
 their daily existence...
 finding deliverance from
 the sorrow, fear and pain

of their every day life.
In part I hope that is what you find in this place...
Something that brings you healing and wholeness...
or salvation...
for that is what that word truly means.
Maybe as we take that message
to our friends and neighbors
and they see it at work in us...
Jesus/God will be truly served...
And maybe this congregation will grow...
and maybe it won't grow
on Sunday morning here...
But God will be served
Because we will be a part of
that healing stream
that flows from God's throne.
So may it be. Amen.