[John 2:13-22](https://biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+2%3a13-22&language=en&version=NRSVUE)

Good morning! I am honored to provide a Message on this Third Sunday in Lent. I am Pastor Wenda Fry, Pastor of the Yoked and Trinity Parishes of Meagher County and it is an honor to share my Message with you this morning. After all, it IS that time of year. Yes. It is the cherished and beloved season of Lent, but it is also that time of the year when a particular phenomenon grips the national sports psyche from the second week of March through the first week of April. March Madness is the moniker that is given to the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](http://ncaa.org/) (NCAA) Men's and Women's Basketball tournaments. These tournaments determine the national champions of college [basketball](https://entertainment.howstuffworks.com/basketball.htm), and send millions of basketball fans into a frenzy each year. These are single-elimination tournaments, which means that the championship team has to win at least six games in a row to claim the title. One loss and you're going home. And, it is an electrified basketball environment! Plus, there’s the chance to witness a crazy "Cinderella-story"—a term that means that a team achieves far greater success than was expected. THAT, frenzied fans, and buzzer-beating baskets give these tournaments their March Madness nickname. Here in Meagher County, we have our own exciting version of “March Madness” as our Lady Hornets are going to the Class C State Championship in Great Falls in just a few short days. We are all so proud of the girls, their teamwork, their success and this opportunity. Many of us will be traveling the short distance to Great Falls to cheer our girls on in their March Madness pursuit! I am quite certain that the fans from Meagher County will rock the Expo center with all kind of cheering, stomping of feet and clapping throughout their first game as they hopefully advance to the next round on Thursday evening…In the Gospel text for today, Jesus steps onto a court that is rockin’ with everything but religion. He steps onto the temple court during the Passover — a religious festival that must have felt like March Madness to the fans of Jerusalem. The historian Josephus estimates that more than 2.5 million pilgrims congregated in Jerusalem for the festival — a huge crowd by any standard. Add to the crowd the thousands of cattle, sheep and doves brought to town for sacrificial slaughter and you have something that begins to look like a religious rodeo! As in any rodeo, there are rules of the competition, guidelines for the cowboys and the cowgirls, and particular things the judges look for…The rules were pretty strict for the Celebration of Passover. On the Day of Preparation, paschal lambs were slaughtered in the temple from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Then the Passover meal began at sundown, with participants recounting the story of the exodus and singing songs of praise. The next day, an offering of first-fruits was made. Passover commemorates God’s liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, the most awesome event in its history. For faithful Jews, both then and now, it’s a pretty good religious adrenaline rush.

But Jesus is pumped about something else when he enters the temple court. Finding people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others changing money at their tables, he gets pretty worked up…Making a whip of cords, he drives the sheep and the cattle out of the temple. He also pours out the coins of the money changers and overturns their tables. And, then he bursts out: “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (John 2:13-16).

What is Jesus angry about? Because he is angry…This is not meek and mild Jesus…But what is he so upset about? At first it’s hard to tell. Some think that Jesus is angry at them for cheating — cheating the pilgrims when they come and buy animals for sacrifice, or change their coinage into local currency. But Jesus says nothing about cheating. Instead, he shouts, “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” (v. 16). Jesus wants the whole thing to be shut down, not just the crooked vendors. He knows full well that pious pilgrims have no choice but to purchase cattle, sheep and doves when they arrive in Jerusalem. They can’t be expected to bring their livestock over all the rugged miles from their distant homes. Still, Jesus insists, “Shut down the marketplace!” Enough is enough. Something has really set Jesus off…There’s no doubt that if Jesus didn’t have enemies before he stepped foot on the temple court, he certainly had them after he left.

It is no wonder, observes biblical scholar Gail O’Day, that the Jews who are gathered at the temple approach Jesus and ask him who made him the boss. They are pretty upset themselves—because this is tradition. This is what has been done for centuries…this is what the law required…what is going on?? So, they ask for authorization. They want proof.

And what does Jesus say? “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (v. 19). WHAT??! We have been building this for 46 years…Can you imagine if Jesus said that to us in our present churches or ministries? Most of our Lutheran churches in Montana are over 46 years old—and then some! We would be offended. The religious leaders certainly were! But they didn’t catch the nuance…they don’t get it. In basketball language, they just want to play the game as they always had…but Jesus shifts attention from the temple in Jerusalem, which has been under construction for 46 years, to the temple of his own body, which will be destroyed on the cross and then raised in three days. For years, the temple has been the place of God’s presence on earth ... but now, with the coming of Christ, the body of Jesus is where God’s Presence dwells.
This is what he announced when he first came to earth. In Mark 1:15, Jesus says: “The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and Believe!” Literally, Jesus was saying: “Change your minds and take some action!” His actions remind us that discipleship is a very active — not passive — calling. And sometimes it can get unpleasant. Especially if we stand up for what is right. What is just. What is kind. Or what is fair. On that day in the temple court in Jerusalem, Jesus got angry.

There is plenty for us to get angry, unnerved or upset about in our world today. Fraud, scams, hit and run accidents, people who can’t seem to tell the truth, people who hurt children, people who hurt others because they hurt— and, Jesus shows us today that we are to act with integrity and righteous anger, if need be. The Lenten journey is not only a time of individual repentance, but it can be a time of collective repentance. We can ask ourselves: Are we fulfilling our ministry goals and the mission of our church—or do we need to change some things? It’s interesting that Jesus doesn’t argue that the temple is just a building; He knew that the temple had been set aside for the glory of God. You have heard it said, “The church is not a building, it’s a people”— But how well are we using our buildings that were dedicated to the glory of God and his mission in our place and time? Is God leading us to a journey of angry discipleship? Are we willing to move beyond the intellectual love of God, to a more vigorous pursuit of justice, peace, righteousness and redemption? What does that look like in your community? Food to the hungry? After-school care of kids of working parents? A new ministry or tweak of an old one or old committee so that there is good news brought to the downtrodden or direction to the lost? Such pursuits can be exhausting, but like a good game of basketball, they can also provide an adrenaline rush! Madness?? Maybe. Discipleship?? No doubt about it. Let’s Pray: Jesus, our Lord and Savior, thank you for your action in the temple at the time of Passover. Some of us are uncomfortable with the feeling of anger and are not used to you being angry about anything. But, your anger was righteous—and ours can be as well. We can use it to work for justice, peace and changes for the better. Guide us this week in our consideration of this. May your Holy Spirit guide each of us and this church in her ministry and mission for the sake of the world you loved and came to save…in your holy name, Amen.