

March 7, 2021

Third Sunday in Lent  
So Close, Yet So Far  
John 2:13-22

**Opening words:** According to the Revised Common Lectionary, this is the Third Sunday in Lent. Our primary reading for today is from the Gospel of John. The author of the Gospel is John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. He wrote it to a Greek thinking audience about the years AD 50 and 85. John's theme is to represent Jesus as the Word, the Messiah, and the incarnation of God, who came to reveal the father and offer eternal life to all who believe in him. John is different than the other three Gospels. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke have been called the Synoptic Gospels, because they are similar. John has his own stories and his storyline. Today's reading is a perfect example. The Synoptic Gospels have Jesus visiting Jerusalem one time, near the end of his ministry. John has Jesus visiting Jerusalem periodically. We find ourselves in the second chapter of John and Jesus is already in Jerusalem. Our Gospel reading for today is John 2:13-22. Let me call this message *So Close, Yet So Far*.

**John 2:13-22** When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. **14** In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. **15** So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. **16** To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" **17** His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." **18** The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" **19** Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." **20** They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" **21** But the temple he had spoken of was his body. **22** After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

When I was in high school, football was a big deal. I never played on the team, but I was a fan. That was a good thing because I consider my high school years to be the zenith of high school football in my hometown. The players on those teams became local celebrities. It was common to see a Division One recruiter sitting in the stands on any given Friday night.

It was during my Sophomore year, the best player on the team was a boy by the name of Tyrone. He had all the skills needed for success. He was big, strong, fast, and quick. He drew a great deal of attention from college scouts. I will never forget the day he signed his National Letter of Intent. The local media was present for the announcement. He made that major announcement from the school's library. (I believe,

it was the first time he had journeyed into it.) Tyrone signed his National Letter of Intent and told the world he was going to Washington State University in Pullman, Washington. The whole community was so proud. One of our own was going to the great northwest to play major college football. Once he signed his name, the recruiter from Washington State gave him a Washington State team jersey, a Washington State baseball cap and a football with Washington State painted on it with the team colors, crimson and grey. Tyrone put on his jersey and baseball cap. He grabbed his football, and everyone cheered. The next day, he came to school showing off his new Washington State gear. As he walked down the hall, everyone congratulated him. When he passed by me, I was standing near a teacher by the name of Dick James. Mr. James yelled out to Tyrone, "So Tyrone, you are going to Washington State!" Tyrone grimed and broke into a Heisman Trophy pose. He yelled back, "Yes, sir, Mr. James. I going to be right there with the president." The noisy hallway grew quiet. Tyrone was so close, yet so far away.

I will confess, I have told you that story in the past several times. I repeated that story today for three reasons. First, I like telling that story. It is fun. Second, people have asked me to retell the story. They like it. Third, the story makes a point. It is easy to be so close, yet so far away. That is what we find in the scripture reading for today.

We find ourselves today in the second chapter of John. According to the text, it was almost time for the annual Passover. The law dictated everyone within a certain radius must attend the Passover in Jerusalem, but no legislation was needed. Everyone wanted to go to Jerusalem. It was a time to reconnect with family and friends. However, it was also time to pay their taxes at the temple. Jesus goes to the temple and cannot believe his eyes. There were people selling livestock and small birds. There were money changers. Do not miss the next line. They are not there to raise money for the local food bank. They are not there to raise money to pay off some temple debt. They are not there to raise money for the next youth mission trip. They are there for personal profit. So, to speak, they were selling salvation. The animals and birds were sold to be sacrificed. The foreign currency had to be changed into an acceptable currency. Everything was done at a tremendous profit. In the name of God, they were exploiting people. The money made the temple leaders blind to God and the needs of their own people. It is still true today. Money is the greatest obstacle to our spiritual development. It is more than Jesus can handle. In a moment of rage, Jesus scatters the animals and birds. Jesus upends the tables of the money changers. Jesus reminds the people the temple was a place of prayer, not profit. Each one of those temple leaders played the part of Tyrone. They were so close, yet so far away.

I hope that is not our story. We do not want to play the part of Tyrone, so close, yet so far away. It is one of the great challenges facing the church today. We can fill our calendars with important church work and forget why we exist. We exist to make disciples for Jesus Christ. Preparing for worship is time consuming and important, but it is more than just entertainment. Sending our young to church camps and mission trips

is important, but those activities are more than wholesome activities. Fundraising is important because we can keep our church financially stable and helps the needy, but money will not save your soul. May we never forget, we are in the disciple making business. So, to keep you from being like Tyrone, so close, yet so far away, I challenge you to do three things today.

**First, I challenge you to reaffirm your personal commitment to Jesus Christ!**

This is a fair question. How did you come to know Jesus Christ? Everyone's story is different. Everyone's story is important. There are no bad stories. It does not matter how you came to know Jesus. It only matters that you know Jesus personally. Your parents can not do it for you. Your grandparents can not do it for you. Your preacher can not do it for you. God wants to have a personal relationship with you. Do you want to have a personal relationship with Him?

When Michelangelo was a young boy, he went to a master sculptor, asking to be a student. As they talked about the commitment needed to be a great artist, the master sculptor said, "Michelangelo, it will take your entire life." Michelangelo responded, "What else is life for?" It is not just true of art. It is true of discipleship. It will take your whole life, but what else matters. Anything less is to be like Tyrone, so close yet so far away. If you are ready to reaffirm your relationship to Jesus Christ say, "**Amen!**"

**Second, I challenge you to reaffirm your commitment to the Holy Habits!**

What are the Holy Habits? The list differs with every group. According to the Living Church, these are the five holy habits: worship, prayer, meditation, Bible study, and service. Others include communion and generosity. How much time do you spend practicing the holy habits? Your answer is very revealing.

There is an old preaching story about a man who bought a parrot at his local pet store. The man was excited about hearing the bird talk, but the bird never said a word. The man returned to the pet store and told the owner about his untalkative parrot. The owner of the store said the bird did not talk because the bird did not have a mirror in the cage. He said, some birds like to preen as they talk, so he bought a mirror for the cage. Still, the bird did not talk, so the man returned to the store. The owner said, you need to buy a ladder. Some birds like to exercise while they talk. Still, the bird did not talk. Next, the owner suggested the man buy a swing for the cage, so the man bought a swing. Some birds like to amuse themselves as they talk. The next day, the owner of the parrot returned to the pet store and announced the bird had died. Shocked, the owner of the pet store asked, "Did the bird ever talk?" The owner responded the bird only spoke once. Seconds before he died the parrot said, "Doesn't that pet store sell any food?" If you do not practice the holy habits, then you are going to die spiritually. If you do not practice the holy habits, then you are going to be like Tyrone, close, yet far away. If you are ready to reaffirm your commitment to Jesus Christ and the holy habits say, "**Amen!**"

**Third, and Finally, I challenge you to reaffirm your commitment to love as a way of life!** There is nothing easy about being a disciple of Jesus Christ. From the moment you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you must find a new way, every day, to thank God for saving your soul. The only way to thank God is by helping other people in the spirit of love. You are not just helping others. You are helping yourself. That is the magic of the Christian faith. Several years ago, Duke University released a study. They reported the most fulfilled people are those who live for a bigger cause. There is no bigger cause than God. If you do not love as a way of life, then you are going to be like Tyrone, close, yet far away. If you are ready to reaffirm your commitment to Jesus Christ, the holy habits and love say, **"Amen!"**

In the tenth chapter of Mark is the story of the rich, young ruler. You remember his story. He had it all. He was rich so he could buy anything his heart desired. He was young so his health was intact. If you have your health, then you have it all. He was a ruler, so he had influence in his community. He had everything, but he did not. The only thing he lacked with spiritual peace. According to the story, the rich, young ruler sought out Jesus to find that peace. He asked the question, we have all asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus asked him if he had murdered anyone, been sexually faithful, offered false testimony, and honored his father and mother." His heart must have jumped when he answered correctly. His heart must have dropped when Jesus told him he lacked only one thing, sell his possessions, and give the money to the poor. He could not do it. The rich, young ruler walked away broken hearted because he was like Tyrone, so close, yet so far away.

Judas Iscariot is the most notorious traitor his history. For three years, he traveled with Jesus. He heard the lessons. He saw the miracles. He felt the presence of the Master. He was trusted and respected by his peers. He was their treasurer. He should have known better, but he betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. I do not know why. Perhaps, he tried to force Jesus's hand, thinking he would fight back, but he did not fight back. Instead, Jesus goes to the cross and Judas hangs himself. It would have been better for him if he would have never had been born. Judas Iscariot was like Tyrone, so close, yet far away.

Pontius Pilot should have known better. He was the Roman Governor in that corner of the world. Jesus stood before him, as well as the common criminal Barabbas. Pilot has the power to saved Jesus's life, but surrendered to public opinion. Instead of releasing the innocent Jesus. Pilot releases the guilty Barabbas. Pontius Pilot should have known better. He was like Tyrone, so close, yet so far away. This is the question you must answer?

Are you like Tyrone, so close, yet so far away? I hope not. I challenge you today to reaffirm your personal commitment to Jesus Christ! I challenge you today to reaffirm to the holy habits! I challenge you today to reaffirm your commitment to love as a way of

life. Years ago, Jesus went to the temple and was shocked by their behavior. What would Jesus say to us? Do not be like Tyrone, so close, yet so far away.