

**Sunday Sermon**  
**March 4, 2018**  
**Exodus 20:1-6, John 2:13-22**  
**“Spring Cleaning”**

### Introduction

Are you ready for Easter? It is not the same effect as saying are you ready for Christmas, is it? In the Advent season leading to Christmas, we race the calendar. From Thanksgiving to Christmas Day, momentum builds like no other time of the year.

But the Lenten journey to Easter is not a mad rush, rather a slowing down. Taking time to meditate, to pray, to study about our relationship with Jesus and his atonement for our sin. At least that is what Lent is supposed to be. Yet here we are four Sundays before Easter, same number of Sundays as in Advent, and things are cluttering our lives just like in Advent.

The Old Testament gives us stories of how for generations God revealed love to the Israelite people through the keeping of covenantal promises, delivery from slavery, faithful care in the wilderness, leading them to a promised land. God taught them how to respond to this love with commandment number one in the law God gave to Moses on the mountain, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Do not let anything or anyone come between you and me.

But stuff did. Pagan influences crept in and cluttered the peoples’ lives and their worship of God. It happened with the Israelites and the golden calf, and many generations later Jesus found it in the temple with the money-changers and the sellers of animals for sacrifice.

### I

It was the maddest, angriest anyone ever saw Jesus. Whip in hand, kicking over tables, driving out animals, slinging coins. And the thing is, not only was Jesus mad. He was in the temple mad; he was at Passover mad. Passover, the happiest, highest feast of Israel’s year.

Passover was the time the people celebrated God delivering them from slavery. And the temple was the place where they gathered to celebrate. So with everyone else quite happy to be at Passover, quite happy to be in the temple of the Lord, it is quite a shock to have this man Jesus kicking over tables and shouting, “Get out of here!” No doubt the people thought he was mad indeed.

Yet cleaning house for Passover was not unique to Jesus in the Temple. Cleaning for Passover has always been a part of Jewish tradition. Jewish families get everything that is unclean out of the house, including every crumb of leavened bread. It is their special spring cleaning to be ready to worship the God who saved them.

Even those of us who have never celebrated Passover know about spring cleaning. Before the advent of the vacuum cleaner, March was the time for cleaning because it was warm enough to open windows and doors but not warm enough for insects, and the March winds could carry the dust out of the house.

On this first Sunday of March, what kind of spring cleaning do you need to do to get ready for Easter? Not in your house, but in your life. Lent is a time for unburdening and getting rid of unnecessary clutter in our lives. The clutter can be addictions; it can be emotions; it can be possessions. It can be anything that gets in the way of putting God first in our lives.

## II

So why did Jesus find the need to spring clean the temple? Because temple business was getting between the people and the worship of God.

You see, worship at the temple had become very expensive for the people. First there was the temple tax. Required of every Jew every year at Passover, the tax was the equivalent of two days' wages. But bringing your money was not enough. The tax had to be paid in temple money, and another entire day's wage was charged to convert the money from Roman currency into temple currency, thus the moneychangers.

But it did not stop there. Worshipers at the temple needed to bring a sacrifice, and the sacrifice had to be without blemish. If your animal had any defect at all, it was not acceptable. There were temple workers who inspected your animal, and if the one you brought with you was found to be defective, which it usually was, guess what? The temple just happened to have perfect ones on hand for sale, at a hefty price.

The temple, the very House of God, had become big business, profiting from people who came seeking God. The sight of it pushed Jesus to his limit, so he did some cleaning. This was not a madman on the loose. Rather the Son of God reclaiming his father's house as a house of prayer.

When the authorities asked Jesus what gave him the authority to do this cleaning service, Jesus gave a strange reply: "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up." Three days they wondered. It had taken Herod forty-six years to build the magnificent temple.

Later, after Jesus had been arrested, stripped, beaten and hung on a cross to die, but after three days kicked down the doors of death, came forth from the tomb, and raised life out of death, then the disciples remembered what he had said that day in the temple. The temple he was talking about was himself.

## III

My husband and I are hoping to relocate for retirement, and in the process we will downsize. So we have started to think about what to keep, what to give away and what to trash.

We realize our lives are the same. We have things we need to share with others; we have things we need to keep and hold precious; and we have other things that just clutter our lives and need to be discarded.

Jesus calls us to do spring cleaning in our lives, to clean up parts that are cluttered with sin, to throw out things that are of no lasting value and prepare ourselves for the resurrection of the Lord in our lives.

In my previous call, my husband and I were required to move closer to the church I was serving. Only I started work there before we secured housing. I was well into my first year when the time came for us to move. I was not prepared, I had not organized anything, and the Lenten season was beginning. But I figured I will lead the Ash Wednesday service, then I will take off a couple of weeks, move, get things unpacked, organized, put away and be back to work in time to finish the last four weeks of Lent and be ready for Easter. Only on the day before Ash Wednesday, after the movers were scheduled for pickup so renters could moving into our old house, I received the call that my mother was dying.

Two weeks later, burying my mother and settling her estate, I returned to get ready for Easter with everything I owned thrown in unlabeled boxes and scattered throughout a new house. A cluttered mess.

My mother had a saying she would use when I would stress about trying to get ready for something. It is going to happen, she would say, whether or not you get everything done that you think needs to be done. It is going to come in its own time and its own way. She was right. Easter with new life, resurrection came that year in its own time and its own way.

## Conclusion

We are called to get ready for Easter, but the truth is we cannot get ourselves ready on our own efforts, our own merits. We are too finite, too limited, too mortal. After all, is that not the message of Lent?

But Jesus has a way of coming into our lives and doing spring cleaning. Overturns our false idols, cleans up the clutter of sin and sets our priorities straight. And reminds us of commandment number one: Do not let anything come between you and God.

It is four weeks before Easter. I wonder: Can we open the doors and windows of our hearts and let the Spirit of the Lord blow through, knocking sin's dust and clutter, whatever is separating us from God? May it be so.