

“Jesus, the Only Lamb”

“We preach Christ crucified” – front and center (literally). Jesus alone – *sola Christus* – that’s the focus, that’s the cry, that’s the message of salvation that the holy Christian Church has always preached.

Only Jesus – not just on the cross – but throughout His ministry. Even before His Baptism – John, the forerunner of the Christ got the attention of the crowds and pointed them to Jesus alone, crying out to them – “Behold, THE Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” All the focus, all the attention – all faith – pointed to Jesus.

Then God joins in with the spotlighting. At His Baptism, God the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove and remains on Him – and God the Father declares from the heavens, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

But there’s more! On the Mountain of Transfiguration – Peter, James and John see Jesus speaking with Moses and Elijah about His departure – but when the cloud that had enveloped them dissipated, they see only Jesus.

In the Garden of Gethsemane – Jesus is with His disciples – but He alone prays. He alone is in great agony. He alone will drink the cup of God’s wrath down to its very dregs. The disciples will scatter, and Jesus alone will be taken in hand, bound, and led away. With all of that in mind – let’s look at our text for today.

“The Passover of the Jews was at hand” – which means that every faithful Jew has Passover on the brain – and at the top of the Passover-To-Do-List is selecting the Passover lamb. Instead of scrutinizing the sheep of your own flock – separating out all the year-old males – looking for defects (and so on) – all that was made easier, because you could simply buy a suitable lamb when you got to the temple.

Now Jesus comes to the Temple at the time of the Passover, one of the busiest times of the year in Jerusalem (more hectic than state-basketball in Lincoln) and cleans house. Out go all the animals for sacrifice – overturned are all the tables of the money-changers.

Now don't misunderstand – the animals were a necessary part of the sacrificial system that God had ordained – along with the money-changers who were there so that the people of God could pay the temple tax that God had instituted.

In just a bit we'll get into the reason why Jesus wreaks havoc in the temple, but for now, simply notice that when all is said and done – here in the temple, the place of sacrifice – there is nothing left to be sacrificed except Jesus. “We preach Christ crucified.”

A crucified Christ? Foolishness! The world thinks worshipping a dead man is folly. The idea of a Messiah that dies is rejected by the Jews. And yet, the Apostle Paul says that “the word of the cross ... is the power of God” to us who are being saved. Nothing short of the death of God for your salvation is necessary – that's what is necessary to atone for your sin.

The problem in the temple was not the sacrificing of animals or paying the temple tax – the problem was that the worshippers had made the Father's house a “house of trade.” Their worship life had become transactional – they dealt with God the way they would deal with others in the market.

To think of God's economy of salvation in this way got Jesus fired up (to say the least). To say that Jesus has “zeal” for His Father's house (and the worship in the temple) – is to say that His zeal is for you! Not only does He not want you to perish eternally on the Last Day – but He doesn't want you to live out your days with this burdensome, transactional life of worship – always negotiating for your salvation.

He drives away the sacrificial animals so that faith only has one sacrifice in which to trust for the forgiveness of sins – His sacrifice as “the Lamb of God.”

In time, the temple too will be destroyed – because the true temple (the dwelling place of God with man) is in the flesh of Jesus Christ.

Even the Ten Commandments – never intended to be the means of salvation which you achieve by bartering with God on the basis of your obedience – Jesus alone, comes and fulfills them all – so that true obedience and a righteous standing with God can only be found in Him alone.

The true worship of God is to receive what He promises and offers. If you've set up your own temple with its own economy of salvation and transactional worship – then Jesus has come to drive all of that away.

If you come to church simply to fulfill a duty – Jesus drives away this focus on you, and what you are doing – so that you might see and hear and believe what God in Christ is doing for you.

If your offerings are tied in to how much guilt you feel over your sin – what does that say about the God you worship? That He can be bought or sold? That it doesn't matter what you do, as long as you can pay the piper?

If you put in your time at church as if you are nothing more than a volunteer doing community service – then God must be the needy one – relying on your service, relying on you to provide for all His needs.

“Zeal for your house will consume me” – literally, “eat me up.” So much does Christ desire true worship – that He is consumed, eaten up in death, the temple of His body destroyed – so that you may receive what God promises and offers – the atonement of all your sin, reconciliation with God, the resurrection of the new man.

Jesus comes to dwell in your midst so that you may eat Him up – so that your zeal might be for His gracious gifts – living as if you cannot live without them! Rather than living in debt, always bartering with God, burdened with the idea that you have to pay Him back – His worship is an economy of grace – where His gifts are just that, gifts, free – which He desires you to have so that you may rejoice and live.

What the world does not get, you treasure – Christ crucified for you and for your salvation. Only Jesus, and His sacrifice – the power of God for your salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.