

Zeal for your house will consume me

One of the walls in the TV room of our house has this recurring crack in it that unfortunately reappeared for the up-teenth time a few weeks ago. We've had it patched several times before; it looks great for a while before the first signs of fissure return and before you know it, the entire crack is open and visible again, from floor to ceiling. The crack is an eyesore and makes the entire room look shabby. This time, we are resolved to take care of it once and for all.

We've been debating what would be the best fix. We've wondered if foundation repair is the solution - maybe the problem is the structure underneath. We've considered enlarging a nearby opening and installing a new French door to mimic a similar opening in the same room. One promising idea is to remove the entire wall altogether; after all, if there is no wall, there can be no crack.

Taking care of a house is a lot of work. We all love our homes, whether they be large or small or old or new or shared or solitary. They demand cleaning, maintenance, and decorating. Our homes are "where it all happens," where most of our time is spent.

Ideally, homes are functional in that there are places to sleep, eat, bathe, and keep our stuff. At their best, homes are pleasantly and comfortably furnished, and welcoming to ourselves and others. We take a lot of pride in our homes - that's one reason our recurring crack is SO aggravating and demands attention.

It's easy to understand Jesus' outrage at discovering that his own home - the temple - is in complete disrepair and requires immediate maintenance. According to the Gospel reading, it's the time of Passover, a national holiday which would have drawn Jewish people from all over Israel to Jerusalem to offer prayer and sacrifice as they commemorated how God freed their ancestors from slavery in Egypt. The city would have been packed with travelers and activity.

The temple was designed as a place for God's people to gather together to worship Him and to experience His presence. Because people were often traveling to the temple from long distances, it became the custom for merchants to sell sacrificial animals like sheep close to the temple grounds so that people wouldn't have to transport the livestock for such long distances.

However, over the years, in order to attract customers, these merchants moved closer and closer to the temple, eventually moving so close that they were taking up space inside the temple itself.

Instead of being a reverent place of prayer and sacrifice, it was now a space full of people arguing over the prices of animals, noisy from the clinking of metal as money was exchanged, and loud with agitated sheep and cattle. There was rampant price gouging as exhausted travelers scrambled to procure animals, and everyone who had a role in the process was skimming off the top.

Both the people and the merchants had forgotten the original, basic function of the temple: that it was intended as a reverent place of prayer and sacrifice where faithful people were welcomed to experience God's loving and powerful presence.

The people should have come to the temple to find a peaceful, reverent place where they could offer praise and thanksgiving to God. Instead the people found themselves navigating corruption and greed, with hardly any space available for them to find a quiet moment - the complete opposite of the temple's original purpose.

Jesus is simply outraged to witness what has become of this holy place that is supposed to be the place where God and his people ~~find~~ each other.

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As we have seen so many times throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus's recourse is to take radical action. You can feel his fury as he overturns the tables and dumps out the money containers. He screams at the merchants to leave and take their goods and greed with them. He even uses a whip to drive out the livestock. In no time, the temple is cleaned and restored as a holy place of God.

In a foreshadowing of Easter, so all consuming was Jesus' zeal for his house of worshipers, so deep was his love for his God and his people that soon, through his death upon a cross, he would sacrifice the temple of his body as penance for the sins of the world.

And, in no time - just three days - through the radical action of the resurrection, Jesus himself would be restored as a holy place through which we all have an unimpeded and everlasting relationship with God.

Lent is a time for us to prepare for Easter through prayer, repentance of sins, fasting, and self-denial. It's essentially a time for us to look around our own temples, our own ^{lives} homes, to find what has strayed so far from God's purposes that it threatens our relationship with God and each other. Lent is an opportunity for us to consider what is noisy around us and what is crowding out the voice of God and our access to him.

It's here that every analogy that we could possibly think of about home repair and our spiritual lives applies.

Are our foundations weak and in danger of crumbling? That is, have we committed to a regular prayer and worship life that will strengthen our relationship with God and help us live at the center of God's will? Strong foundations will help sustain us through life's many storms, see God's work in our lives, and help us reach out to others.

Are our roof gutters full of leaves and debris that block their very purpose? Clearing out our own destructive behaviors like pride, greed, jealousy, and selfishness could help us repair and restore relationships with ourselves and others, allowing us to function more fully as instruments of God's grace and love.

Does our front porch have plenty of "curb appeal" so that others - friends and strangers alike - feel we are approachable, and a place where they want to be? Do we greet people openly and with a smile?

In the years ahead, St. John's will have opportunities to embrace more and more newcomers who, like the Passover travelers we read about today, are looking for a place where they can gather to worship God and to experience God's presence. Working together, we can keep St. John's a holy place that is welcoming to all.

As for the crack in the wall in our TV room, we haven't yet made a decision about what to do about it. Although it is very tempting and it would solve the problem forever, I'm pretty sure bulldozing the house is not the solution.

Let us all consider what in our spiritual lives and relationships need to be cleaned ^{OUT,} repaired, or rebuilt entirely. Like Jesus, let our zeal for God's house consume us and inspire us to take whatever action is necessary to maintain St. John's and ourselves as holy temples of God. Amen.

Reference:
<https://westhills.org/blog/2022/05/10/john-2-13-25-study-guide-clearing-out-the-temple#:~:text=The%20temple%20of%20God%20was,the%20true%20and%20better%20temple.>