

So if you are a visitor – we want to welcome you – or if you haven't been with us yet this Lent, or if you have been with us and --- have been asleep –

Throughout Lent I am building my homilies each week around a quote. . . that captures for me the message of the Gospel.

So on Ash Wednesday we began our time of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with this thought:

“Lent is a time for discipline, for confession, for honesty – not because God is mean or fault-finding or finger-pointing BUT because God wants us to know the JOY of being cleaned out and ready for all the good things he has in store for us.” [N.T. Wright]

So I hope your Lenten cleansing is going well – so that when Easter rolls around, you will be ready for all the good things he has in store for us – and I have in store for you in my preaching during the 50 days of Easter --- I think it is always appropriate that Easter lasts longer than lent!

On the first Sunday of Lent, we were driven into the desert with Jesus, to begin our Lenten cleansing – and reflected on this quote: “If you're never able to live for anything bigger than your pocketbook, your stomach, or your career – then you will never be able to bless those around you.” [Tim Keller]

One of the good things God has in store for us is our calling to be a blessing, a beatitude, a source of God's goodness to all those we meet. We can be distracted from that calling by being OVERLY

concerned about our pocketbooks, our stomachs, and our careers. . .

Last week, we ascended the mountain with Peter, James, and John. And were reminded that, “we’ve got some difficult days ahead. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up the mountain, and I’ve looked over and I’ve seen the promised land.” [Martin Luther King, Jr.]

We are back on the mountain-top again today. Hopefully enjoying the presence of Christ is me, your unworthy servant, in the words of Scripture, in the bread and wine which will soon become the body and blood of Christ --- and in the smiling faces of those around us.

And now on this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent, we get to my favorite quote of the season – from the Protestant Reformer: John Wesley.

Who said: “Catch fire with enthusiasm, and people will come from miles around to watch you burn.”

So Jesus goes to the Temple – a very sacred place for him and for all Jews – and he sees some things that disturb him – and since “zeal for his father’s house consumed him” he chased the money changers and the bird sellers out of the temple.

“Zeal for his father’s house consumed him.” Zeal means to have fervor for a person, a cause, or an object. It is an eager desire or an endeavor; ---

it means enthusiastic diligence or ardor.

Devotion, eagerness, fierceness, determination, drive, gusto, and --- fire – are all synonyms for zeal.

And this zeal for his father's house – *consumed him* – which means Jesus was absorbed or engrossed by it.

*Jesus caught fire* – and certainly it did not take long for most of Jerusalem to hear about it – at least not long for the scribes and Pharisees to hear about – it was one of the last straws laid upon their patience from this upstart from Nazareth – and they begin to look for ways to shut him up – they all want to be fireman and put his fire out. . .

Which brings us to a very simple reflection for ourselves ---and the point of the quote: what do we get enthusiastic about? What do we have zeal for? What sets us on fire?

Is it more the things that tempt us in the desert – then the things of the kingdom of God??? Are we more excited about what fills our bellies, how big our bank accounts are, and what we can do to gain a little prestige this week ----- or is it more the things of the kingdom: like. . . mercy, forgiveness, compassion, and understanding?

What excites us – and what should excite us? Two very different, but important questions.

I had lunch with a friend this week who was saying how much he is looking forward to the Easter

Vigil – as he does every year. . . and he can't figure out why more people don't come to the Vigil. . .

And I said I think it is the length of the service that throws most people off. . .

And he said well, it's about the length of a movie or a football game – and who complains about those things being too long?

“Set yourself on fire with enthusiasm – and people will come from miles around to watch you burn.”

What excites us – and what should excite us --- *if* we call ourselves a follow of Jesus?

Perhaps reflecting on the answers to these questions – and making the appropriate adjustment in our lives – will make for a more profitable Lent – than giving up candy. . .