

Over the years our living space has grown, and we have found ways to fill every nook and cranny. Shelves and cabinets are full, walls are covered, rooms are furnished, and our basement is full of what is needed for hobbies and home repairs. Too often I wonder “where in the world did all of this come from?” And then, I worry about how in the world I will be able to part with stuff that has so many memories and makes me feel comfortable at home? It is so difficult to let go of what has been important over time.

Throughout our lives, there are moments when there is so much clutter around us that we must simply start throwing or giving things away. Whether we call it downsizing or simplifying, we know it is important. But why are the things we surround ourselves with so difficult to part with?

And I ask not about physical items, but what about guilt, worry, disappointment or grief that clutters our memories and living in the same way? How do we discard what we just can't ignore or get away from? Think about those questions as we deal with Jesus and the temple.

John's Gospel is different than Matthew, Mark, and Luke. It is a structured theology, rather than a journal of events in Jesus' ministry. For instance, in John, Jesus first moment of ministry is a miracle at a wedding in Cana, as he revealed himself as the new wine (or Messiah) promised by Prophets. Immediately Jesus showed up in Jerusalem to attack the commercialization of the temple. What seems an awkward beginning for a loving Jesus, who seemingly allowed anger and frustration to cause him to go ballistic, is in fact the key to his mission.

The temple was to assist in bringing people close to God but had become overwhelmed by big business. Currency traders and livestock vendors assisted the needs of thousands of world travelers to offer sacrifices at the temple. But the noise, smell, and competing vendors overwhelmed the possibility for peaceful meditation and prayer. The opportunity to be close to God had digressed into an Amazon-type shopping experience.

Into that setting Jesus arrived for the feast of unleavened bread, to celebrate God's rescue of slaves from Egypt. Preparation began by cleaning all the yeast out of a house, so it could not contaminate new dough. This Passover meal also looked anticipated a promised Messiah, who like Moses, would come to rescue his people in a miraculous way.

By Jesus' day, people knew all the routines by heart but didn't take them to heart. The trinkets, animals, and currency exchanges, like yeast's chemical reaction, had changed the atmosphere and setting for worship in an unintended way. Fresh from announcing he was the new wine of a new kingdom; Jesus went to the temple to remove all that had tainted a well-intended system of worship. This prepared for his ultimate sacrifice on the cross and victory from the tomb to become the leaven that would change us forever.

Consider how we leaven or season worship and lives of faith. Think about patterns we follow, without even stopping to think about what they mean. Jesus didn't insist on a certain style of music or window or chair or dress code, all of which can be helpful, but any of which can become like a golden calf at the foot of Sinai. Just like at home, much of what becomes so important and necessary isn't really as important as the basics of love, faith, and peace.

The real issue for Jesus wasn't the money changers but hardened hearts and inattentiveness to

God and neighbor they represented. So easily can a sinful world lose a sense of God's blessings and our call to respond with sacrificial love and a daily glory to God in how we live. Like everything touched by sinful people, even worship had become more important than a loving relationship with God. People thought the right actions would insure heaven, while Jesus showed heaven was given by God's grace.

There are so many necessities in life that can get in the way of our worship and lives of servant love. Too often we seek to build structures to keep God distant while God seeks to build a relationship in us so that wherever we go and whatever we do, his presence is the leaven that changes all.

Jesus' cleansing of the temple announced that man's priorities had replaced God's. Jesus came to announce that his sacrifice would enable us to be assured of God's love, so that what we did in response could be true worship. Jesus' actions were not just about the Jerusalem temple but all the stuff we surround our daily living with that gets in the way of faith.

This calls us to consider how important it is to evaluate all the priorities, needs and expectations of daily living, which can become more important than our relationship with God. Is God only in one place where I choose to worship, or is worship my daily response to the powerful love of God that I meet in so many different ways? We often worship together to remember how important it is to keep his song in our heart and his love in our living.

By this dramatic moment at the temple, Jesus announced he would make all things new. He would be the sacrifice that would become the bridge to God. Our sacrifices are not to appease an angry God but to reveal new and loving hearts he has created in us. What seems foolish to a world that needs to define and restrict God's power, is what frees God's power to define and shape us.

It only takes a little yeast to make the whole loaf rise. What influences our thoughts and actions and faith? What influences our response to God's love? God's call is for His house to be cleaned daily! It is not enough to go to God's house, for we are called to be God's house in every part of our living.

The simple truth is that loving God and neighbor is how we worship. God's temple is not where we go but who we are called to be! We gather together in a special place for an important family meal, nurture, fellowship, and prayer. But we do so to support our lives as the temple of God in every moment of our daily living. We show our love for God in how we live that love each day.

True worship is simply our daily response! Sacrifice is not ritual but lifestyle of love! The yeast that helps our lives rise is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus; and in response, God calls me to leaven lives around me with that same love.

Cleaning isn't always a fun project, but often it is necessary. Allow yourself time again to clean out what distracts you from being the Church. Cleanse what pollutes the temple God has called you to be! It's about becoming rather than observing. It is about a spirit-filled life not a ritual that becomes routine! We remember one day in the life of Jesus, so that in every day faithful people will be moved to cleanse what is clutter and celebrate what will give God glory as we share the light of his love in a world overwhelmed by the shadows of sin. (seeber)