

By Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Set a globe, recent newspaper, news magazine photos, and a bowl of water before you.

LEADER: I brought you out of the place of slavery.

ALL: Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

LEADER: Stop turning God's house into a marketplace.

ALL: Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

LEADER: Destroy this temple and in three days I will rebuild it!

ALL: Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

At a recent gathering at the 1875 family homestead, I watched the little kids have fun running in the fields, driving a four-wheeler, seeing sky in all directions. The farm is prairie again. The children are my cousin's kids' kids. How do I answer to them about what we humans are doing to our common inheritance, Earth?

In my ecological promises for the year, I have used less air conditioning and wasted less food, but I have failed to drive less and ride the bus more. The bus stops beneath my window, but day after day I have a reason to drive the 2.5 miles. I share the road with inspiring people who have organized their lives around biking to work even through cold, snowy winter.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

Not me, yet. Maybe, maybe this year.

In the pope's view Earth needs the same cleansing Jesus gives the temple in Sunday's gospel. Jesus reclaims the temple for prayer, chasing out sellers and moneychangers who have turned it into a marketplace. "We have come to see ourselves as Earth's lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will" (#3), the pope writes.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si', On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis enters into dialogue with all people about repairing our planet. His letter begins with lyrics from the Canticle of St. Francis of Assisi, "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs" (#1).

Pope Francis supports United Nations efforts to set limits on global warming. He teaches an integral ecology that urges personal conversion and international collaboration. "Our goal," he writes, "is to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (#19).

When our government made the United States the only nation to refuse to keep the Paris agreement, individual states and businesses stepped into the gap. A windmill farm stands along the road to our homestead. A solar field stands at the north end of the town where I grew up. Such projects create jobs and reduce carbon dioxide and other polluting gases.

● What are you doing to clean and repair our planet home?



Underworld/Shutterstock.com

GOSPEL

Jesus' zeal sets relationships right.



NARRATOR 1: The Jewish Passover was near. Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and money changers sitting at tables.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus made a whip of cords and drove them all out of the temple—sheep, oxen, money changers. He poured out their money and overturned their tables. He spoke to those selling doves.

JESUS: Take these doves out of here. Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.

DISCIPLE: This is like the scripture says, "Zeal for your house consumes me."

OFFICIAL 1: What sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?

JESUS: Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.

OFFICIAL 2: It has taken 46 years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it up in three days?

NARRATOR 1: Jesus was talking about the temple of his body. When he had been raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this to them, and they came to understand the scripture and the words Jesus had said.

NARRATOR 2: While Jesus was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many came to believe in his name, for they saw the signs he did.

NARRATOR 1: For his part Jesus would not entrust himself to them because he knew them all.

NARRATOR 2: Jesus needed no one to give testimony about human nature. He knew what was in the human heart.

John 2.13-25

Jesus cleans God's house.

John's gospel sets the story of Jesus cleansing the temple at the beginning of his public ministry rather than near the end as the synoptic gospels do. When Jesus comes to the Jerusalem temple for the feast of Passover, he has barely begun his ministry. He has called his first disciples and worked his first sign—changing water into an abundance of wine at Cana. Sunday's gospel

passage follows, in which Jesus acts dramatically to cleanse the temple of those who change money for paying temple tax and those who sell animals for sacrifice.

Jesus' zeal seeks to restore his Father's house as a place of prayer rather than commerce. His short explanation is a great Tweet. "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." His disruptive actions of dumping out money and

overturning tables might become breaking news today.

Similarly Pope Francis makes direct, quotable statements about repairing Earth, which he reverences as God's creation and our sacred home. He urges us to stop pollution and our wasteful ways. "The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (#21). "Earth is a shared inheritance... God created the world for everyone" (#93).

● What similarities do you see between cleansing the temple and caring for the earth?

In each of the synoptic gospels Jesus cleanses the temple shortly after his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. In each gospel Jesus explains his actions, saying, "My Father's house is a place of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers." In Mark and Luke Jesus' actions result in temple officials seeking a way to destroy him.

In Matthew, the blind and lame seek Jesus out in the temple after he chases the buyers and sellers out. The temple becomes a place of prayer and healing. The chief priests and scribes acknowledge Jesus is doing wonderful things but grow indignant that the sick acclaim him as the messiah. Jesus' actions stir up controversy and opposition as he makes the temple a field hospital.

● What angers you enough to act and advocate for change?

● How is your church a field hospital? How is it a living temple?



In John's gospel Jesus' cleansing of the temple becomes a revealing sign. This gospel writer sets up deliberate misunderstandings that require conversation about what Jesus' actions mean. When officials ask Jesus for a sign of his authority, he makes a response with a double meaning. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

Jesus' words are an enigma to the officials, who think Jesus refers to the temple building. For believers, Jesus refers to their post-Easter faith.

John the evangelist writes near the end of the first century after at least six decades in which Christian communities break bread in Jesus' name and reflect on who he is in the light of his resurrection.

The miracle in chapter one at the Cana wedding reveals Jesus is the best wine saved until last and available in such abundance that we recognize this wedding celebrates more than a marriage. It is a messianic banquet celebrating the new community gathering around Jesus.

The cleansing in chapter two in Jerusalem at Passover reveals Jesus is the new temple, in whom God dwells among us. He is the Word who was with God and who is God and becomes one of us.

DO SOMETHING

CHARITY

JUSTICE

- Visit Global Catholic Climate Movement online for action ideas in repairing our planet. Take the *Laudato Si'* Pledge at livalaudatosi.org.
- Read about the Michigan Urban Farming Initiative online, a project university students started in Detroit. Many parishes have gardens that bring volunteers of all ages together and provide food in the neighborhood.

We who believe in Jesus, in his resurrection from the dead, become a new living temple, his body, filled with his Spirit.

Sunday's gospel ends with Jesus exhibiting the serene knowledge of all things that characterizes the pre-existent Word. This Jesus needs no one to tell him about the human heart or the ultimate cost of his actions in the temple. In John's gospel Jesus is both one of us, experiencing anger and conflict, and one with God, knowing all and freely, generously participating in loving us.

- **What insight does placing the cleansing of temple near the beginning of the gospel give you about how Jesus understands his mission in John's gospel?**

Jesus' cleansing the temple calls us to clean our houses this Lent, to examine our hearts. Our fast-paced,

productive lives can erode our relationships with God, make us feel like cogs in the wheels of commerce rather than friends of God who live and love in friendship with the Giver of Life. Coffee and conversation can help us reengage with those we love.

Walks in the emerging spring can reawaken our connectedness to all that is, our place in the holy whole that is our Earth home. Walks can stir us to get practical about caring for creation where we live.

Lent this year calls us to listen to one another, to assess where we have enough and can give. Lent calls us to assess what we consume and what consumes us. It calls us to revive our faith in resurrection as a continuing process in our lives.

- **What housecleaning do you need to do in your life?**
- **What housecleaning do we need to set relationships right in our Church?**
- **What do we need to clean up in our biosphere so life on Earth becomes sustainable? What can I change?**



The Creator's liberating covenant

Christians often picture the God who delivers the ten commandments as a stern and forbidding judge. The thou-shalt-nots outnumber the thou-shalts eight to two.

A closer reading recognizes their life-giving vision. The commandments hold a pattern of right relationships between the Creator God and all creatures, including humans.

The first commandment describes God as one who brings people out of slavery and one who is jealous and passionate for such love to be returned with love.

The third commandment models a day for worship on God's rest after the work of creation. People, animals, and aliens among the people are to work for six days and then to rest on the seventh day, just as God did in creating the world. Honoring parents, ancestors, and animals leads to long life in the land which God promises.

The commandments forbid killing, adulterating, stealing, giving false witness to neighbors, and coveting a neighbor's spouse, slave, animal, or possessions. These are actions that break down relationships and don't fit the pattern of liberating life in the image of God, the Creator.

The Ten Commandments.

"I, Yahweh, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.

"You shall have no other gods besides me. You shall carve no idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above, or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, Yahweh, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting the punishment for the ancestors' wrongdoing on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.

"You shall not take the name of Yahweh, your God, in vain. For the Holy One will not leave unpunished those who take God's name in vain.

"Remember to keep holy the sabbath day. Six days you may labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the sabbath of Yahweh, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you. In six days God made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day God rested. That is why Yahweh has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

"Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which, Yahweh, your God, is giving you.

"You shall not kill.

"You shall not commit adultery.

"You shall not steal.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's spouse, nor male or female slave, nor ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him or her."

Exodus 20.1-17

● In what ways are the commandments liberating and life-giving for you?

● Where would we be without them?

PRAY

Take a brief quiet time to surface one bit of housekeeping you want to do in Lent.

LEADER: We celebrate God the Creator and Jesus the homemaker by cleaning our Church and family house and hearts.

Take turns sharing with the group the housecleaning action to which you commit yourself or make the commitment in silence.

LEADER: Let us sign one another on the forehead with water to make our commitment.



Give those who will be received into the Church at Easter the gift of *Sunday by Sunday*. We will send April 15 through September 30 for only \$10.00 per person.

To order call 800-232-5533
or goodgroundpress.com

Joan Mitchell, CSJ, the editor of *SUNDAY BY SUNDAY*, holds a Masters of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.