John 2:17b “Zeal for your house will consume me.”

 It is an extraordinary event. But because we don’t pay attention to the history behind it, we miss the total wonder of it. So first, let’s make sure we have this history accurately placed. Please note that we are in John chapter 2. This is really the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. The verses just before our section are those that speak of the Wedding at Cana, you know, where Jesus performs his first miracle because of the request of his mother. The next thing we hear is that Jesus has gone to Jerusalem, gone there because it is the Passover festival. Does that ring a bell for you? It should! Please remember that Jesus will die to pay for our sins three years later at the Passover festival of Jerusalem.

 Yes this is the beginning of his ministry. Remember the sequence of events. John’s gospel starts with John baptizing in the wilderness, really with John’s testimony concerning Jesus. As we put all the events of the Gospels together, here is the sequence. John baptizing, Jesus gets baptized, Jesus goes into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days and nights, Jesus returns and begins to pick disciples, the wedding at Cana and then Jesus goes into Jerusalem at this Passover. And boy, what happens!

 Imagine the scene. Here is Jesus in Jerusalem. It is possible that already the wonder of his turning water into wine is the talk of the town. But here is what I will tell you. Please note what verse 23 says. **“While he was in Jerusalem for the Passover Festival, many believed in his name as they observed the miraculous signs he was doing.”** It is clear that while Jesus is in Jerusalem, perhaps from the moment he enters the town, Jesus is performing miracles. Evidently quite a few miracles because it is clear that already people are beginning to believe in Jesus, They might not be sure what they believe about him yet, but it is clear that people are looking at Jesus, they are surrounding Jesus, they are paying attention to Jesus.

 It is then that Jesus cleanses the Temple for the first time. Let the picture sink into your mind. Jesus has a whip made of rope. Jesus is lashing at animals and knocking over stalls, gates and any such thing associated with the buying and selling of animals in the Temple. It appears he even chases the animals out, probably along with their owners. Next, Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers. Coins fly everywhere. You can imagine that some chaos ensues. You can imagine that there is lots of noise and excitement. What Jesus has just done is absolutely extraordinary. He has upset, attacked, and for at least a number of hours put a huge dent in the money making machine of the Jewish priesthood. And no one does a thing!

 Let me explain further. The Jewish priesthood, under the guidance of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin have a lock on Temple worship. They decide what animals are acceptable for sacrifice. They decide what money is to be given and how much is to be given. It is quite the scheme. And I say a scheme because it is well known that as you bought your animal for sacrifice you paid the highest price. Or as you changed your everyday money into the official money of the Temple, the exchange rate highly favored the priesthood. No wonder Jesus is upset. He cries out for all to hear: **“Get these things out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a place of business!”**

I must chuckle. I wonder when we will learn the simple point of what Jesus has told us? What is the purpose of the church? It is not to be marketing. It is not to be business. It is to be declaration. The declaration of the wonder of Jesus. It is to be the sharing of the message of a Savior from sin where the truth and awesomeness of God and His Word is to be the heart and core of what we do. Church is to be a place of worship, where the praise and glory of God is what the members have gathered to do. No wonder Jesus is not happy with what is taking place in His Father’s house. Jesus sees clearly that what is taking place is the “business” of church but that business is not serving to the glory and wonder of God!

 Let’s contemplate this section of God’s Word under the theme: **ZEAL FOR GOD’S HOUSE!**

 I do think that a rather adequate theme. I especially think it adequate when you and I remember the words of Philippians 2:1-2, 5. They say, **“So if there is any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, them make my joy complete by being like-minded, have the same love, being united in spirit, and having one mind…Indeed, let this attitude be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”** In other words we are encouraged to be imitators of Christ, to let the attitude and heart of Jesus drive us and motivate us as His children and heirs of eternal life. We actually hear this teaching throughout the life of Jesus. Jesus tells us to be His light to the world. Jesus tells us He is the vine, we are the branches. Jesus tells us to bear good fruit to his glory. Again, in other words, you and I are to have a “zeal for God’s house.”

 What does that mean? In its simplest form it means that we regard God and his House, his Holy Christian Church with the utmost of importance. Not because we want to merely look good but because we want to serve the Lord in our lives. Again, since we are using the Catechism in our Lent series this year, let’s turn to our Catechism to help us out here too.

 The first place to go would be the Third Commandment. Clearly the Third Commandment is all about taking time for God, about making the Lord God and his wonder the heart and core of your life. But remember, the Third Commandment isn’t really about being “in Church” or doing things “in Church.” The Third Commandment is about hearing God’s Word, especially hearing the message that Jesus is our Lord and Savior from sin. It is always interesting to me, that while the Third Commandment encourages us to be in Church it does so only in the sense that Church is where we will indeed find the wonder of Jesus and his salvation. You see, the Catechism does not ask, “When are we guilty of despising Church?” The Catechism asks, “When are we guilty of despising God’s Word?” Because if we are not getting that wonder and marvel of God’s Word in our lives, then the fact is, we are not being strengthened in our faith and in our lives of imitation of Jesus.

 Just as a good reminder, how do we answer that question on despising God’s Word? There are three answers: We are guilty of despising God’s Word if we refuse to hear it. That simple means we don’t use it, don’t hear it, don’t really care about what the Bible has to say. Next, “We are guilty of despising God Word if we let anything in the world crowd it out of our lives.” I love this one. In its simplest meaning it is saying to us, “When there is an opportunity to give thanks and praise to God, do you find you have every excuse for not being there?” Maybe your problem is you adore St. Mattress more than Jesus? Perhaps it is St. Money, or St. Partied too late. Could your problem be St. Cabin in the woods, or St. Fishing, Bowling or Ball? Maybe you are just wrapped up in St. I’ll Do What I Want and Jesus Can Take a Hike.” Exactly what is it that is keeping you away from the very place God has given that you might get a regular dose of His medicine of the gospel? And if you aren’t here, then are you reading or watching the message of God’s Word online? Seriously, what excuse do you have for “no zeal for God’s House?”

 The third one says, “We are guilty of despising God Word if we listen to it but don’t believe it or don’t do what it says.” In this regard, we can turn to a few other places in our Catechism. Under the Second Article of the Apostles’ Creed, where we hear of the marvel of Jesus this question and answer is given. “Why did Christ redeem me?” Answer: “Christ redeemed me so that I might be his own and use my whole life to serve him in his kingdom.” Or we can turn to the Third Article where we learn of the work of the Holy Spirit. We ask, “What change does the Holy Spirit work in me when he sanctifies me by the gospel?” Answer: “He leads me to hate sin and to be eager to live a holy life filled with good works.” And just for good measure here is another question and answer that we need to get right. “Why do I do good works?” Answer: “I gladly do good works to express my love and thanks to God for all of his goodness to me.” As you listened to those answer you heard “eager, gladly, express my love and thanks.” Now you are beginning to understand “zeal for God’s house.”

 But we are not yet done. Let’s go to the First Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Hallowed be your Name.” Under that petition we ask, “How do we keep God’s name holy?” Answer: “We keep God’s name holy by teaching his Word in its truth and purity.” Answer: “We keep God’s name holy when we as children of God lead holy lives according to his Word.” By the way, these same answers are found when it comes to “Thy will be done.” All of this is there to help us understand what we are speaking of when we want to imitate “zeal for God’s house.”

 Do we have “zeal” for God’s house? I am really speaking to you about whether or not you grasp the wonder and joy of God’s Word, especially that message of Jesus. In that regard, did you catch the conversation that Jesus had with the religious leaders because of what he did? It’s recorded for us in verses 18-22. **18So the Jews responded, “What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?” 19Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.” 20The Jews said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple! And you are going to raise it in three days?” 21But Jesus was speaking about the temple of his body. 22When Jesus was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this. Then they believed the Scripture and what Jesus had said.**

 I do not want you to miss the utter importance of these words. Remember this is the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus. Evidently, some of the officials do confront Jesus on the chaos he has just caused. They ask, **“What sign are you going to show us to prove you can do these things?”** I love these hard-hearted guys. You do understand that the question they ask infers that they are clearly aware of the miracles that Jesus has been doing since He arrived in Jerusalem. But in their hard-heartedness, they don’t want those miracles. They want to see something special. Really? Here is this guy who is healing the sick, the lame, and all sorts of other things, special things, miracles, and you want more? Why do we always think we know better, have better ideas, and see better than God himself?

 Now catch the marvel of Jesus’ answer. **“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again.”** I can honestly see Jesus pointing to his body was he is saying this. I think what Jesus said was obvious to just about everybody except those who do not want to believe. As a Jewish religious leader you should know the promises of Scripture. You should know that God’s Word tells you that the true mark of the Savior, the Messiah, the Son of God is going to be that he will die and then come back to life! The sign of Jonah. The words of Isaiah 53! Jesus is pointing already to His resurrection, some three years away that will complete his credentials as God and Lord of all.

 Do we get that? Is the heart and core of our faith Jesus, the Son of God who died for us and then rose from the dead to offer us the forgiveness of sins and eternal life? We have the most exciting, the most earth shattering message this world has ever known and often we are like: “Yeah, Jesus rose. Yeah, okay, what else ya got to excite me? I know all about it and frankly I am just tired of hearing it all!” If you even find a hint of that attitude in your heart, then you might be more like the Jewish religious leaders than Jesus!

 We have the wonder of Jesus! His message is clear and plain. His message is our forgiveness and eternal life. His message is the change and strength He will give to get us through this “valley of the shadow of death.” Jesus has the balm of healing, the bread of life, and the living water. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the Vine, the Door, the Son of God! Jesus is our Savior. He gave his life for us. He rose from the dead as total proof of this. Here is the greatest reason to have “zeal for God’s House.” In this house, we hear and glory in Jesus. In this house, we proclaim the joy of salvation and the forgiveness we have in Jesus. In this house, our task has been eagerness, gladness and zeal for the true Passover Lamb who has been raised from the dead and is the Lord of Lord’s and the King of Kings.

 Heavenly Father, thank you for Jesus! Thank you for his message of sins forgiven and new life because He has risen from the dead. Give us His zeal for Your House! This is our Christian faith. Amen.