

Few things are sadder than the vandalism of the sacred. When a meaningful expression of our faith gets trashed, it's hard to take. For example, it is heart breaking to hear about a church that is targeted by arsonists or a cemetery desecrated by some calloused thrill seekers. Such atrocious behavior is so repugnant that it often makes the 6 o'clock news.

Sacred real estate is in trouble today. One of the favorite pastimes of radical jihadists is blowing up any sacred space that is not Islamic. In France a growing French Muslim population has targeted thousands of abandoned Catholic churches, not so they can destroy them but purchase them and turn them into mosques. Catholics make up 64 percent of France's population. Unfortunately only 4.5 percent of French Catholics regularly attend church services. Their sacred space is not so sacred anymore.

But vandalizing the sacred is not limited to jihadists. Here at home, enterprising entrepreneurs are purchasing the property of dying churches and turning them into nightclubs. Some even claim tax-exempt status by calling themselves a church. So far, their subterfuge has not fooled the equally enterprising taxing arm of local governments.

Mark 11 is about vandalism. It contains one of the greatest examples of vandalism in history. Jesus confronts this disregard for the sacred in no uncertain terms...vv. 1-11.

The King entered the city and most people didn't even notice. It was business as usual for the people in Jerusalem. Jesus even made sure that the people knew He was there. He requisitioned a donkey (only a king could do that) and rode into the city with an entourage. This was a specific fulfillment of OT prophecy.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble, and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey. Zech 9:9

Then Jesus entered the temple area. Take another look at v. 11. What happened when He got there? Nothing happened! The promised Messiah arrives and no one notices. They are too busy with other things. The rejection Jesus warned His disciples about has begun. Rather than being received as King of Kings, He is completely ignored. How is it possible to ignore the long-awaited Messiah? Simple: **Israel valued their culture over their Christ**. Gradually, over time, the primary purpose of temple worship was crowded out by human ambitions like power and position and profit. It happens every Sunday.

There are all sorts of reasons to come to church – to make friends, meet a spouse, listen to the music, hear a motivational speech, or just give the kids something to do. If we forget our purpose then we become another religious social institution competing with other churches to see who can provide better services. We promote consumerism and while we condemn the consumers.

The next time Jesus goes up to the temple, that sacred space was being turned into a flea market...vv. 15-18. What is happening here? **Israel not only valued their culture over their Christ but they valued commerce over calling.** As a result, the temple was not a welcoming environment for the Gentiles. Worship was big business for insider Jews. Merchants and moneychangers set up shop as close to the temple as possible. It's no mystery how Jesus felt about all of this vandalism of the sacred. This is one of the few places where we see Jesus expressing anger and it wasn't the first time He has made His feelings known about this desecration of the temple...Jn. 2:13-22.

Jesus left the temple and continued to demonstrate His opinion of barren religion by cursing a barren fig tree...vv. 12-14, 20-21. What does the fig tree have to do with the temple? They are both functioning improperly. In the OT the fig tree was symbolic of God's people and their service to Him (Jer. 8:13, 24:1-10; Hos. 9:10-17; Micah 7:1). The tree was planted by God to bear fruit. Fruit was promised but it was a promise not kept.

When our cultural practices become more important than Christ, when commerce is valued more than calling, we will experience God's displeasure. On the other hand, "the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." 2 Chron. 16:9

Jesus uses this opportunity to telegraph His disciples that God is forming a new community characterized by three distinctives – diversity, prayer and forgiveness.

The church is a diverse community. Jews and Gentiles are welcome.

The church is a house of prayer. We are not a place of prayer. Prayer is not restricted to one place. Jesus is calling His disciples to be temples on wheels, mobile homes of prayer. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. *YOU* are a house of prayer. We regularly gather in this place for prayer but then we scatter to continue to offer our prayers to God, bold prayers...vv. 22-24.

The church is a forgiven people...v. 25. The temple was the place set aside for all those who came to acknowledge their sin and receive forgiveness through the sacrifices God required in the Law. But rather than offering forgiveness the temple had become a "den of robbers" where religious leaders took advantage of those who came to worship. The church is not a place where you go to get forgiveness, we are a forgiven people who wouldn't think of accepting God's forgiveness without forgiving others.

Jesus has nothing but judgment for any faith community that does not welcome Him gladly and serve Him faithfully. We dare not forget why we come here on Sunday. If you came for entertainment I hope you will leave disappointed. If you came for the coffee I KNOW you will leave disappointed. If you came for any other reason than to worship and honor Jesus Christ, to pray and extend His forgiveness to anyone who seeks it, then you have a dangerous misunderstanding of the church.

When nonessentials become essentials, mission becomes optional. We are the people of God who gather to worship and scatter to take the Good News of Jesus to everyone we meet.

Do you eagerly anticipate the presence of Jesus when you come to church? Do you come seeking the Caller?

Do you take the church with you when you leave? Will you leave and pursue your calling?

I want to invite you to express your faith right now in two ways. We are going to take communion, a symbolic meal that recognizes the body and blood of Christ. Before we partake we want to be sure that we are not just going through the motions. So take the prayer card in your worship guide or the seat back in front of you and as our ushers come, fill it out. Pray. YOU are a house of prayer. We are not a place of prayer we are to be a people of prayer.