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Crossways International
Minneapolis, MN 55435 USA
1-800-257-7308
www.crossways.org

The Revised Common Lectionary Notes February 4, 11, 14, 18, 25, and March 4 by the Rev. Dr. Harry Wendt, founder of Crossways International

February 4, The Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany: Mark 1:29–39

(Some of the comments offered in this section are repeated in the pericope notes for the First Sunday in Lent.)

Immediately after Jesus and the four disciples leave the synagogue in Capernaum, they go to the home of Simon Peter and Andrew where Peter’s mother-in-law is sick with a fever (1:29–31). Despite the fact that it is still the Sabbath (when healing of the sick—deemed as work—should not take place), Jesus heals her.

That evening at sundown, *after the Sabbath is over*, crowds from Capernaum come to the home where Jesus is staying, bringing to Him many who are sick (1:32–34). Jesus heals many of them, and casts out many demons. He will not permit the demons to speak, because they know Him (i.e., they recognized His power and authority).

Very early the next morning, Jesus leaves the house to pray in a lonely place (1:35–39). The disciples look for Jesus, find Him, and tell Him that everyone is searching for Him. Jesus then summons them to go with Him to the surrounding towns in Galilee, where He will proclaim His divine message. In the course of doing this, Jesus preaches in synagogues and casts out demons.

Jesus’ message is summed up in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come (the NRSV adds the word *near*); repent, and believe in the good news.” That word *near* can be misleading. It gives the impression that the kingdom of God is on its way but has not broken in as yet. No! The kingdom of God *has* broken in—in the Person of Jesus the Messiah, humanity’s forgiving Savior and Servant Lord. It has come, and Jesus invites people to “get on board.”

So, no more waiting and no more delay. The hopes and dreams of God’s people are reaching their grand finale in the ministry of Jesus, the radical Servant Messiah. Hence, we today are to repent, to “get a whole new mind,” about Who made and owns the universe and the body in which we reside and how we are to use the body and life that God is lending us (*lending* us—not *giving* us). Jesus has come to proclaim good news! He, not Caesar, is Lord. He, not Caesar, rules the world. He, not Caesar, brings

peace, and He, not Caesar, proclaims good news. How different is the Kingdom that Jesus brought—so different from the kingdoms that have surfaced throughout the sweep of history, and so different from the systems that continue to bring chaos to humanity.

February 11, The Last Sunday after the Epiphany Transfiguration Sunday: Mark 9:2–9

There comes the day when Jesus leads Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. When they reach its summit, Jesus is transfigured before them and His clothes become dazzling white. Moses and Elijah appear and engage in conversation with Jesus. Peter offers to build a dwelling for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah; Peter's suggestion reflects wilderness events and personalities. A cloud then overshadows the group and a voice declares, "This is My Son, the Beloved; listen to Him." The experience and vision then come to an end—and the disciples see only Jesus. What is the message of the voice from the cloud?

The statement, "This is My Son, the Beloved" reflects Psalm 2:7—a coronation Psalm used when a descendant of David was anointed into office as king. (*David* means beloved.) Its message in the transfiguration event is: "You are getting your kings back. The Davidic line is being restored," *but in a very different way from what you have been expecting!*

The words "Listen to Him!" reflect Deuteronomy 18:15—a verse that states that God will eventually provide His people with a new prophet, a new Moses, to whom they must listen. Jesus is that new prophet, but He will share with His people guidelines for a way of life radically different from that which they have been observing.

In Matthew's transfiguration narrative (17:1–8), the voice from the cloud refers to Jesus as *King*, *Servant*, and a *New Moses* (Psalm 2:7, Isaiah 42:1, Deuteronomy 18:15).

In Luke's transfiguration narrative (9:28–36), Moses and Elijah speak with Jesus about His coming "exodus" (not "departure") that He will "complete" (not "accomplish") in Jerusalem. Jesus' entire ministry is understood as a rescue mission that He will complete in His crucifixion (*coronation*) that His Father will endorse by raising His Son from the dead (*vindication*).

The *disciples* did not even begin to understand the message of the voice from the cloud until after Jesus' resurrection. However, a *Roman centurion* who stood at the foot of Jesus' cross declared, "Truly this man was God's Son!" (15:39).

February 14, Ash Wednesday: Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

6:1: The message of Matthew 6:1–18 might be summarized as follows: "Beware of practicing your piety (literally, "your righteousness") out in public in order to be seen—to catch people's eyes and garner human admiration." To live that way is anything but a demonstration of faith. Those who live this way are not looking for a reward from their Father in heaven—and should not be surprised when they receive none. All they are doing is laying up treasure on earth (6:19).

Jesus' teachings on almsgiving (6:2–4), prayer (6:5, 6) and fasting (6:16–18) follow the same pattern. Each paragraph contrasts the behavior of hypocrites with the behavior expected of Jesus' followers.

6:2: When Jesus' followers give alms, they must not be like the hypocrites. In the Greek world, *hypocrite* was the word for an actor. In the New Testament, this word has the larger meaning of a moral or spiritual pretender, one who merely *plays* the part of righteousness without *possessing* the inner reality. In Matthew's Gospel, *hypocrisy* is contrasted with *righteousness* (5:20), *perfection* (5:48), and *wholeness* (22:37-40). Only hypocrites feel the need to give alms out in public, in the synagogue and in the streets, to the accompaniment of trumpet fanfare.

6:3: Jesus urges His followers not to calculate when and where the giving of alms will make the greatest public impression. He calls them to give in such an unselfconscious fashion that even their left hand does not know what their right hand is doing.

6:4: Jesus' followers are to give alms in secret—hiding the deed not only from public notice but also from themselves. They are to give alms, not to impress crowds, not to win words of gratitude from the recipients, but simply as God's partners in divine generosity toward all—especially the poor and defenseless. Jesus combines traditional images and phrases from home and market, and never fails to produce fresh results—cracking through traditional systems.

Jesus tells His disciples that God *is already* their Father (ten times in 6:1–18). God does not become fatherly or motherly, receptive and loving, as some kind of payment only after a disciple has piled up a sufficient heap of deeds well done. Although God likes good deeds better than evil deeds, He is repelled by posturing, disappointed by hypocrisy, and angry when people use other human beings only to display their own religious standing.

An Anglican clergyman serving a parish near Oxford, England, shared the following insight: "When the day comes that I want people to notice me rather than Jesus, I invalidate my ministry."

6:5–6: Hypocrites are consistent in that they pray the way they give alms. They love to stand (the ordinary posture for prayer, just as sitting is the posture of teaching (5:1) and pray, putting themselves on display in the synagogues and at street corners so that they might be seen. Jesus sets one extreme against another: prayer on street corners versus prayer in the tool shed or broom closet, display rather than secrecy, seeking applause from others rather than single-minded fellowship with God.

6:16–18: Jesus tells His disciples that when they fast, they are to do the opposite of what the hypocrites do. The hypocrites contort their faces so that the pain of their fasting may be seen. They deliberately cease bathing, anointing their bodies, and combing their hair. They sprinkle ashes on their heads and put on a garment made of coarse materials. They do these things to advertise their piety!

Jesus does not forbid fasting (9:14–15), even though some prophets declared that God preferred justice to fasting (Isaiah 58:3–9; Joel 2:12–13; Jeremiah 52:12). He urges those who fast to go to extremes that are the exact opposite of the hypocrites: anoint your head and wash your face. They are to practice piety for God's eyes only!

6:19: Treasures in the ancient world included expensive cloth and finely woven garments, easily ruined by moths (James 5:2). If the treasure was a hoard of coins (Sirach 29:10), an exquisitely carved box or paneling, or a barn full of wheat, it was vulnerable to being eaten away by rust or worm. Thieves could break in by digging through the mud-brick walls of a home, or by digging up a family treasure from its land (Matthew 24:43 and 13:44, respectively).

6:20: The answer to human concerns for security is not to hire more guards or to invest in more durable goods. It is to turn away completely from treasure on earth to treasure in heaven—to security beyond the reach of moth, rust, and thieves who break in and steal. Jesus' words point to the vulnerability of human treasures and to the insecurity of a life that focuses only on such things.

21: Jesus calls His disciples to cut any chain that links their joy, peace, and security to the ebb and flow of markets and fortune. When their treasure is in heaven, if what really counts is the name, sovereignty, and will of God, then their heart, life, and joy will rest on a foundation as firm as heaven itself.

February 18: The First Sunday in Lent, Mark 1:9–15

(The first three paragraphs contain insights already shared in the study for the Second Sunday of Advent; see Mark 1:1–8.)

John the Baptist, who is dressed like Elijah (2 Kings 1:8), is sent by God to prepare the people for the coming of God's Messiah. John carries out his mission in the wilderness (see John 1:28), the place of expectations and new beginnings, the place where God said He would take His people to renew them and draw them closer to Himself (Hosea 2:14–15). "People from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem" go out to John and are baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins in the process.

That Jews submitted to John's baptism is remarkable, for traditionally only Gentiles were baptized when they converted to Judaism. Furthermore, it would seem that John baptized people in the vicinity where the Israelites first crossed the Jordan and entered the land under Joshua—suggesting that John's baptism constituted a new beginning, a new entry into the Promised Land for the people of God.

John does not baptize to draw attention to himself. He does so to prepare the way for the One who will follow after him—One who will be much greater than he is. John says that he does not deserve even to perform the most menial task for Him—to untie the thongs of His sandals (a task that only a Gentile slave would perform). John can baptize with water, true! But the One to whom he points will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Imagine! He will bestow the Holy Spirit, not just on a few select ones in the Jewish nation, such as judges, kings, and prophets, but on all who come to Him to receive what He has to give; see Joel 2:28–29. And eventually, the Holy Spirit will come upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:44–48).

Mark 1:9–15: Jesus, who is living in the northern region of Galilee when John begins his work, heads south so that John might baptize Him also (Mark 1:9). Jesus does not need baptism for the forgiveness of any sins. He seeks baptism by John to identify Himself with the New Age that His Father is about to begin with His ministry. After all, Jesus is the new Son of God. As the old son of God, Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea and the River Jordan, so the new Son of God must pass through the water of John's baptism. Jesus will lead His people into the inheritance of an eternal relationship with the Father.

As Jesus comes out of the water after His baptism, He sees the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on Him (1:10). Centuries before, the prophet had cried out, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down" (Isaiah 64:1). At Jesus' baptism, the heavens are indeed torn open, and the Spirit comes down in a form that resembles a dove and hovers over the head of Jesus. The rabbis (teachers) spoke of the dove as a symbol of the nation of Israel; see also Hosea 7:11, 9:11, and

11:11. At Jesus' baptism, the Spirit in the form of a dove hovers over the head of the new Son of God, the true Israel. Jesus will lead a life directed entirely by the Holy Spirit.

At His baptism, Jesus is anointed into the office defined by the voice from heaven: "You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased" (1:11). As noted earlier, this statement reflects Psalm 2:7—a psalm used in ancient Israel at the anointing of a king from the line of David. Its use at Jesus' baptism declares that God has kept His promise; the line of David will not die out. Jesus is, indeed, the long-awaited descendant of David, the long-expected Messianic King, who has come to rule God's people and empower them to carry out God's mission to the world.

The direction that the life of this Messianic King will take will be different from what many are expecting. "With you I am well pleased" is a quotation from the first of Isaiah's Servant Songs (42:1–4; note v. 1). As Messianic King, Jesus will be *The Servant*. He will be despised, rejected, and His people will do their very worst to Him. They will finally crucify Him! However, through His death He will lavish on them the offer of a complete, perfect, and eternal pardon, and draw them into a relationship with Himself in which they will find true life, now and forever.

After Jesus is anointed into office as the long-awaited King and the nature of His Kingship is defined, the Spirit leads Him into the wilderness for *forty days*. After passing through water, Old Israel was taken into a wilderness for *forty years* to be tested and tried—but did little else but sin and complain. Israel's behavior in the wilderness was pathetic.

1:12–13: After His baptism, Jesus—the new Israel, the new Son of God—is led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. Mark's temptation narrative consists of only three words, "tempted by Satan" (1:12). In their respective narratives, Matthew (4:1–11) and Luke (4:1–13) list three confrontations between Jesus and Satan. Although both Matthew and Luke conclude their temptation narratives with a reference to Satan *departing* from Jesus, Mark makes no such statement. Most likely, Mark's point is that throughout His ministry, Jesus engages in a nonstop battle with Satan, and He finally conquers him when He gives away His life at Calvary. In confronting Jesus, the Servant-King, Satan does not merely meet his match; he meets his Conqueror!

Mark 1:13b states, "Jesus was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him." According to the rabbis of Jesus' day, the first fall into sin took place when some of the angels refused to honor Adam and Eve. But now the angels are serving and honoring the New Adam, the true Son of God. Furthermore, Isaiah (11:6–9; 65:25) stated that when the Messianic Age finally broke in, animals would live together in peace, and would not harm one another or humanity; see Hosea 2:18.

After John is arrested, Jesus returns to Galilee to launch His public ministry. He begins it by proclaiming a message that causes many Jewish hearts to beat wildly with excitement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come; repent, and believe in the good news" (Mark 1:15). We might summarize Jesus' message as follows:

The age that you and your ancestors have longed for has finally arrived—in Me. Your dreams are about to be fulfilled. *The kingdom of God has broken into history! Change your whole way of thinking and living. Rejoice! Embrace the good news of the Messianic Age in all that you believe, think, say, and do.*

When Jesus declared that the kingdom of God had broken into history in and through Him, He was doing something that was politically dangerous. To announce any new kingdom was to challenge the power of the Herods—and behind the Herods were the Roman authorities and emperor.

Some Jewish expectations about the dawning of the Messianic Age were extravagant. However, the setting for Jesus' opening statement is anything but spectacular. There is no display of cosmic fireworks when Jesus speaks. Jesus' audience sees no halo around His head, no regal clothing, no retinue of servants or royal guards, no pomp, and no splendor. Indeed, the setting and Jesus' appearance are anticlimactic to the Jewish religious and political leaders. To the best of their knowledge, Jesus is the son of Joseph the carpenter and his wife Mary. Even so, the claims the New Testament makes about who Jesus is, and the implications of His opening statement, are profound.

Mark's message in a nutshell: The Old Testament narrative reveals the origins of the Jewish people, their rescue from bondage in Egypt, God making a covenant with them at Sinai, their gaining possession of the Promised Land and establishing Jerusalem and the temple system. Mark's narrative focuses on Jesus preparing to visit the temple and deal with its religious system—its "salvation marketing system." Prior to dealing with the temple system, Jesus reveals His Father's love and will for people of all nations and lands. He invites people to leave the "kingdoms of the world" and to enter into the "Kingdom of God"—and to believe and do what membership in that Kingdom implies. Throughout the first half of Mark's account, Jesus discourages people and evil spirits alike from declaring who He is. Although He wanted people to come to faith in Him as God's Messiah, He wanted them to see clearly what kind of Messiah He had come to be. He consistently refused to use His power to benefit Himself in any way. The people, the authorities and His disciples found it difficult to relate His lifestyle to traditional expectations about what the Messiah would be like and what He would accomplish. Although they were waiting for the coming of *their* Messiah, they got *Jesus of Nazareth*—God's Messiah—instead.

February 25, The Second Sunday in Lent: Mark 8:31–38

Mark's Gospel contains three blocks of materials structured around the themes of *Prediction*, *Confusion*, and *Clarification* (8:27–38; 9:30–37; 10:32–45). The assigned text should include 8:27–30, the first of the three passion predictions.

The Heart of Mark's Message

When Jesus appeared on the scene, the Jewish people had been waiting for the coming of a Messiah and the Messianic Age for centuries (Isaiah 60:1–6; 61:1–9). The Messiah they were expecting would not come to save God's people from their sins (that was not needed); he would come to save God's people from foreign control and give them dominion over the nations of the world forever. However, the New Testament Gospels insist that Jesus—the radical Servant Messiah—was the fulfillment of all messianic hopes.

Mark deals with two basic questions: What kind of Messiah was Jesus? What kind of Messianic Kingdom did Jesus establish—and what, in turn, did (and does) this imply for Jesus' followers?

Mark 1:1 states, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ (better, Jesus the *Messiah*), the Son of God." The "good news" is that the Messianic Age has finally arrived. It begins ("The beginning," with a parallel to Genesis 1:1) with Jesus. Jesus (which means "He saves") the Christ ("the Anointed One," *the Messiah*) has come. Old Israel's role as *son of God* (Exodus 4:21–23; Hosea 11:1) has been superseded; Jesus is the *true Son of God*.

When referring to the “good news,” Mark is not suggesting that God is about to forgive sins for the first time. God always has, and always will, gather people into fellowship with Himself by grace through the forgiveness of sins. Rather, Mark is saying that Jesus’ Person and ministry is God’s fulfillment of Old Testament dreams.

The implications of Mark’s opening verse become more profound when its contents are seen as a foil to the claims of the Roman Imperial system: “Caesar is Lord!” “Caesar rules the world!” “Caesar brings peace!” “Caesar is the savior of the world!”

The Geography of Mark’s Narrative

Mark’s narrative begins with a reference to the ministry of John the Baptist (1:4–8). According to John 1:28, the Baptist was working in the vicinity of Bethany beyond the Jordan; but note also John 3:23.

Mark has no infancy narrative. As an adult, Jesus goes south from Nazareth to be baptized by John (1:9–11), into the wilderness to be tempted (1:12–13), and then returns to Galilee (1:14). Note that Mark’s temptation narrative consists of only three words, and makes no reference to Satan departing from Jesus.

The battle between Jesus and the demonic continues all the way to the cross! Mark 1:14–7:23 describes Jesus ministry in Galilee. However, in Mark 5:1–20 Jesus works in the region to the east of the Sea of Galilee; note the reference to Gerasenes and the Decapolis (5:1–20).

Jesus heals the daughter of a woman living in Syrophenicia (7:24–30). Next, Jesus travels through the region of Tyre and Sidon to the Decapolis (7:31–8:11). Jesus then moves north to Caesarea Philippi, and along the way He heals a man in two stages in the vicinity of Bethsaida (8:22–26).

On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus predicts his approaching passion for the *first time* (8:27–38). Jesus then heads south and predicts it for a *second time* while on the way to Capernaum (9:30–35). In 10:1, Jesus leaves Galilee, sets out for Jerusalem, and along the way predicts it for a *third time* (10:32–45).

Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus at Jericho (10:46–52), and five days before His crucifixion enters Jerusalem for the first time during His ministry (11:1). On the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus asks the disciples who *the people* think He is and who *they, the disciples*, think He is. Although *the people* do not see Jesus to be the Messiah, it appears that *the disciples* do. Peter answers for them all, “You are the Messiah!” (Mark 8:27–30). But do they really understand?

While Peter understands *who Jesus is*, he does not understand *Jesus’ Messianic role*. Why not? After Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus (for the first time in Mark) predicts His approaching suffering, death, burial, and resurrection (8:31). Jesus’ words are too much for Peter. He rebukes Jesus!

Jesus responds by telling Peter that he is on the side of Satan (8:33). Jesus goes on to explain to the disciples that if they wish to be involved with Him, they are called to follow Him as that Servant-King who denies Himself to spend the whole of life in selfless service of others. To belong to Jesus means seeking to use life as Jesus did, no matter what the cost (8:34–38).

The disciples find Jesus' remarks about His coming passion difficult to understand. They, like others in Israel, are looking for a Messiah who will free them from foreign oppressors and give them continuing material prosperity. Their concern is, what benefits are in it for them? Jesus' call to the servant life falls on confused, disbelieving ears. Jesus continues by telling them that they will soon see the most powerful demonstration of God's Kingdom—when Jesus is nailed to a cross (9:1).

When Jesus predicts His approaching passion a second time (9:30–32) the disciples are still confused. They argue about who will be the greatest in the new order that Jesus is about to establish (9:33–34; e.g., who will be your Vice-President, your Secretary of State?). Once again, Jesus points out that anyone wanting to be great in His Kingdom must seek greatness opposite from the way the world seeks it—by devoting life to the service of others (9:35).

After Jesus leaves Galilee and sets out for Jerusalem (10:1), He predicts His passion for the third time (10:32–34). The disciples' response shows that they have still learned nothing (10:35–37). Their concern has to do with which of them will be assigned the place of honor in Jesus' coming coronation ceremony in Jerusalem. Jesus responds by pointing out the difference between the way the world measures greatness and the way He measures greatness (10:42–45). Has the confusion displayed by the disciples cleared up in today's church?

March 4, The Third Sunday in Lent: John 2:13–22

After turning water into wine at a marriage feast in Cana (the first of seven “signs” in John), Jesus goes to the temple in Jerusalem and drives out the animal sellers and moneychangers. To unearth the implications of Jesus' actions, it is essential to know something about:

- the temple and its leadership;
- coinage acceptable to the money changers;
- the business style of animal sellers; and
- the “salvation marketing system” practiced within the temple's walls.

John places Jesus' attack on the temple system at the *beginning* of Jesus' ministry, while the synoptic writers place it at the *end* of Jesus' ministry. Although some suggest that Jesus attacked the temple system twice, we would do well to bear in mind that John is focusing on theological themes rather than narrative sequence. Jesus could not have attacked the temple system twice. After Jesus' first attack, the temple officials would have made it impossible for Him to attack it a second time.

Jewish teachers in Jesus' day taught that when the Messiah came, He would go straight to the temple. Once there, He would establish His throne, reign in a political/military manner, and bring peace, prosperity, and social justice to the land and its people. The fact that Jesus' attack on the temple system coincided with the celebration of Passover (with its central theme of “exodus” and rescue from foreign domination) adds to the implications of Jesus' actions. However, Jesus has come to save His people from the real enemy: the powers of Satan, sin, and death.

Herod's (The second) temple was the focal point of Judaism. The Fortress of Antonia was located on its northwest corner. Many Roman soldiers were stationed in this fortress to watch over what took place within the precincts of the temple's huge platform; during major festivals they were posted on top of the porticos surrounding this platform. Furthermore, the Romans kept the High Priest's vestments

within this fortress—which meant that he had to “check them out” prior to each major festival and return them when it ended.

If Jesus had come as a political revolutionary, He would have called those following Him to storm the Fortress of Antonia and drive out the Roman soldiers stationed within its walls. He did not do that!

Instead, He attacked some of the corrupt practices carried out within the temple’s precincts—practices designed to generate cash: *animal selling* and *money changing*. Both were activities designed to extract money from prospective worshipers.

The Sadducees, religious rulers from a few elite Jerusalem families, had the oversight of the temple’s money machine. They also controlled the Sanhedrin (*Jewish Supreme Court*) and functioned as judges as well as Chief and High Priests. And they were corrupt! They embraced no belief in life after death; for them, whatever you wish to get out of life you have to get in the here and now. Their scriptures consisted solely of the Pentateuch; they did not accept the Prophets, the Writings, and the oral traditions.

In Jesus’ day, there were approximately 9,000 temple priests—although only the elite Chief and High Priests resided in Jerusalem. The rest lived in towns and villages outside Jerusalem, and served at the temple twice per year for one week each shift. Furthermore, about 80% of the people living in Jerusalem obtained their income by providing accommodation, food, and sacrificial animals for pilgrims visiting the temple. Little wonder that they all wanted to perpetuate the temple system!

The leaders of the temple were as creative as they were corrupt. At that time, coins from Tyre had the highest silver content of all coins used by pilgrims throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The Sadducees decreed that Jews could use only this Tyrian half-shekel to pay the annual temple tax (for a month before, and twenty days after Passover). Any pilgrim who brought other coins, such as bronze and low-silver content coins from other parts of the world, was required to exchange them for the high silver-content Tyrian coins coveted by the temple’s leaders. And naturally, the moneychangers always charged a handling fee for exchanging the unacceptable coins into Tyrian half-shekels.

The corruption did not stop there. If a pilgrim brought his or her own animal to the temple for sacrifice, the temple inspectors all too often found that the animal was “blemished.” (And of course, they charged a fee for this “unbiased” inspection!) The pilgrim was then forced to buy a “non-blemished” animal from temple flocks—at an inflated price. Little wonder, then, that Jesus was enraged by the system He witnessed within the temple’s precincts.

During the Passover, the people’s hopes for another “exodus,” another rescue, was at its peak. Little wonder, then, that the Roman soldiers were on the lookout for any kind of political disturbance. So when Jesus fashions a whip, most likely made from the cords used to control the animals (no sticks or weapons were allowed on the temple mount), and starts driving the animals and the animal sellers away, imagine what these soldiers must have been thinking. However, none of the soldiers made any attempt to intervene— even when Jesus redirected His anger toward the moneychangers and overthrew their tables.

We are not told what took place in the minds of the disciples as they watched Jesus’ actions! In the observant Judaism of Jesus’ day, how was righteousness achieved? It was achieved by:

- exercising scrupulously lawful behavior,
- going to the ritual purification baths when ceremonially unclean, and
- offering the prescribed sacrifices.

It was this religious system that imputed “righteousness” to the Jewish people; those who did these three things had no need to repent. They were already “right with God.”

In John 2, Jesus replaces all three legs of this “righteousness” stool. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus’ actions signaled the end of the need for *ritual purification*. By driving out the animal sellers, Jesus signaled the end of the need for *animal sacrifices*. And Jesus’ own servant life modeled what *God-pleasing righteousness* is all about. Do ponder Zechariah 14:21 and note also that the temple leaders did not assert their innocence nor contend that what Jesus did was wrong. We would do well to ask what might happen if Jesus walked into some worship services today. Would He hear His Father’s theology being proclaimed and taught? How would He react to entertainment-oriented, “What’s in it for me?” worship services? How might He respond to those “feel good,” “you-too-can-be-a-financial-success” Sunday morning messages?