#### 3/16/25 Sunday Message

#### What do we stand for? Entering the Spirit of Lent II

#### Rev Nina Clark

***Message***

I believe that with most stories, we can glean more than one meaning. Think of the story of the man on the roof of his home, in the midst of rising flood waters, who refuses all rescue attempts, sending them on to others in need.

We could glean that this man was rather arrogant in his expectation that God would rescue him in some special way that God wouldn’t offer to any others similarly stranded and gather meaning from that.

We could decide that he was one of the best examples of humanity, his strong faith allowing to put others ahead of himself, and garner meaning from that. We could take a lesson from that story that putting ourselves last doesn’t always serve for perhaps if he had allowed himself to be rescued, he could have helped others in another way. Etc. Etc.

And it is no different from the stories or scripture from the Bible. We can read these stories and glean different meanings. We can look at them literally. We can look at them through a historical and cultural context. We can sift through them for a deeper metaphysical meaning, Etc. Etc.

And so, this year we’ve been talking about entering the spirit of Lent by looking at The Passion of Jesus, or Holy Week through the lens of what he, his disciples and others around him stood for. What does The Passion tell us about this? And then how can we use what we learn or what is revealed, to inform us about we stand for.

Last week we began by looking at what Lent might mean for us. For many it has come to mean a time where we give up something - a bad habit - or we add in a good habit.

Charles Fillmore writes in his book, “Keep a True Lent,” that for the ancient Hebrews, forty was symbolic. It didn’t mean a literal 40 days, but more the idea of however long it took to complete something in preparation for that which was to follow.

This aligns with the idea presented last week of using the forty days of Lent as a springboard into a higher consciousness rather than a countdown for how many days we will adopt or refrain from certain behaviors.

Charles invited us to consider Lent as “…a preparation for the resurrection of the mind from the darkness of its… doubts and false beliefs into the light of understanding.”

And so, we are invited to use Lent as a time of preparation for a breakthrough in consciousness.

We also explored alternatives to what we might give up for Lent versus chocolate, gossiping or binge-watching Severance or The White Lotus in case we wanted to use Lent for that purpose.

And I shared with you that I believe the most important thing for us to let go of is fear. Fear is at the root of most of what keeps us from shining our lights fully, from showing up as Love. Fear of being wrong. Fear of being hurt. Fear of looking foolish. Fear of being different. Fear of falling short. Fear of loss, of not being loved or lovable. Fear of not being good enough.

As we let go of fear, we come to know ourselves truly as emanations of the Most-High, as divine expressions of the One Life. As we let go of fear, we come to know ourselves as Love.

Last week we also talked about Yeshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem and what it revealed to us about what he stood for.

Continuing our Lenten story, the day after Yeshua’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, he entered the temple.

From Mark 11:15-19

“Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.”

And from John 2:13-21:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle.

“He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

If you’re like most people, when you hear this scripture, the image in your head, not dissimilar to the movies, is that the whole Temple is affected by Yeshua’s actions. He cleaned the Temple out, scattering cattle and sheep and people and money in all directions.

But here’s the real picture. The Temple complex was about 40 acres in size. If a football field is just over an acre, this is approximately 40 football fields in size. Huge.

There was an inner sanctum, and several courts all clustered together in the center- the court of the Priests, the Court of Israel and the court of the Women, and then an outer court, which surrounded this central cluster. It was in this outer court that the vendors sold their goods.

It was also a very noisy place, full of people purchasing their offerings from the vendors, animal noises, happy boisterous people greeting old friends.

So, if Jesus turned over a table or two, and runs out a few cows, it doesn’t really make a big impact given the overall size - and those on the other three sides of the complex would not have noticed what he did at all, given the court structures in the center. It’s important to note that his actions did not bring all business to a halt.

Many ideas have been put forward as to what ignited his anger, but Jewish New Testament scholar Dr. AJ Levine thinks that his anger has more to do with the people coming to worship in the Temple than issues with the Temple itself.

Given that Yeshua’s actions really didn’t halt the flow of business or create that much of a disturbance, it is more likely that his actions were a symbolic gesture to gain the ear of those nearby.

For Yeshua, the temple was Holy Ground, a place where all were welcome to come and worship God. The temple was intended as a place for everyone to worship and was open to all people. All people, including both men and women, slaves, Jews, Gentiles, free people, rich people, poor people. All were welcome.

And yet, the outer court, called the Court of the Gentiles because gentiles were not allowed beyond this court, was where the money changers and the vendors who sold sacrificial animals were allowed to set up.

Returning to the gospel of Mark, Yeshua says, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?” And in Matthew 21:13, “It is written,” he said to them, “‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it ‘a den of robbers.’”

In saying this, Yeshua is referring to verses from the Tanakh (what Christians refer to as the Old Testament) which is the only Scripture that Jesus would have known for the New Testament didn’t exist yet.

The “house of prayer” comes from Isaiah 56:7, where the temple is described as a gathering place for everyone, and the “den of robbers” is from Jeremiah 7:11, referring in essence to a reprimand to those who put on an outer show of faith, but in actuality are not living up to the teachings.

Based on the scripture that Jesus chose to quote, it is most likely that he was taking issue with the fact that the temple, supposedly welcoming to all, had turned the Holy Ground of the outer court of the Gentiles into a place of business, monopolized by tables for money changers, merchants and their customers, rather than a sacred space of worship.

He’s saying, “For Goodness’ sake people, let this be the Holy Place that it is! We have the whole city for vendors and money changers.” This part of the temple that should have been set aside for gentiles to worship, had been taken over by a marketplace. This was not in alignment with it being Holy place set aside for worship and prayer.

The scripture in Jeremiah that Jesus is referring to, reads: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are safe!’—only to go on doing all these abominations?”

By referring to this passage, Yeshua likely saw that the people coming to the Temple were more interested in showing off their elegant clothes, posturing, paying lip service to their faith, but in reality, living daily lives not in alignment with their teachings.

I think that still goes on today in our houses of worship. I knew a gentleman who considered himself a devout Christian. Monday through Saturday he was a landlord who allowed his tenants to live in sub-standard conditions, leaky pipes, moldy walls and yet every Sunday showed up to church acting like he was the most pious of all. It was this type of behavior that contributed to Yeshua’s anger.

The next day Yeshua returns once again to the temple, this time to teach.

The first of his teachings that we’ll look at is from Mark 12:28-34

“One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him (Jesus), “Which commandment is the first of all?”

Jesus doesn’t skip a beat: “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

“The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Jesus later gives us a new commandment. In John 13:34, he states, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”

Dr Levine writes, “The command to “love one another” is not new. Therefore, the focus of the verse must be on the second part, “as I have loved you.” Jesus shows his love by willingly sacrificing his life. That’s an extraordinary love, a love that risks all. But it is not an impossible love. Jesus is, once again, not asking anything of us that he does not ask of himself.”

In modern times I am reminded of Martin Luther King, Jr., who I feel showed his love for the people of our time, by risking his life to teach us, to remind us of who we truly are, and of who we could be.

So, putting it all together - what can we glean from these writings about what Yeshua ben Yoseph stands for?

At the risk of Roman capital punishment life, Yeshua rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, surrounded by his followers. In challenging Roman authority, Yeshua demonstrates an unshakable stand for the world he envisions, one where all are equal in the heart and mind of God, one where all are welcome. A divine kingdom where we all know our worth as expressions of the divine.

By expressing his anger in the temple, Yeshua was standing for the power of what he felt the deeper message of the Jewish teachings were. That everyone entering the temple was standing on Holy Ground and that they should be there to participate in a sacred time of prayer and worship.

In the passion of his anger, I feel that he is inviting the people within the range of his voice to wake up! Again, risking his very life, he is taking a stand for the world he envisions - one filled with love, justice, equality for all expressions of the Divine.

Even his teaching in the temple was fraught with risk and danger. He is in a city under the watchful eye of Roman soldiers who are on the lookout for anyone who might be antagonist to Roman rule. He risks being arrested and whatever horrors might follow.

Moreover, because he is teaching publicly in the Temple, his audience is not only his students - there are also those who are trying to trip him up so that they can either discredit him or have him removed.

And so once again, he risks it all to take a stand for what he believes in - his Divine vision of a world where all is sacred, where love reigns, heaven on earth.

And he gives us a new commandment: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. *Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.”*

And in giving us his new commandment, he again demonstrates his commitment to his vision of the world he sees as possible if we will but only wake up. A world where Divine Love is expressed in all that we do.

With these words Yeshua tells us that he stands for Love. Love of God. The Love that is God. That Holy, wonderful, amazing Love that we all are. And that with and as Love, we can together create heaven on earth.

Once again, as we journey through this season of Lent, I invite you to consider what it is that you stand for and what might you be willing to give up to bring it into being? My hunch is that whatever it is you stand for, what needs to given up will have its roots in fear.

As we decide what we stand for, we build a strong inner foundation on which we can stand and interact with the world from a place of conscious choice.

And maybe you begin by just building an inner foundation of love. Of knowing that you are love expressing. Or an inner foundation of peace or wisdom. We can stand for these things and let that inner foundation direct our outer response to the world around us.