

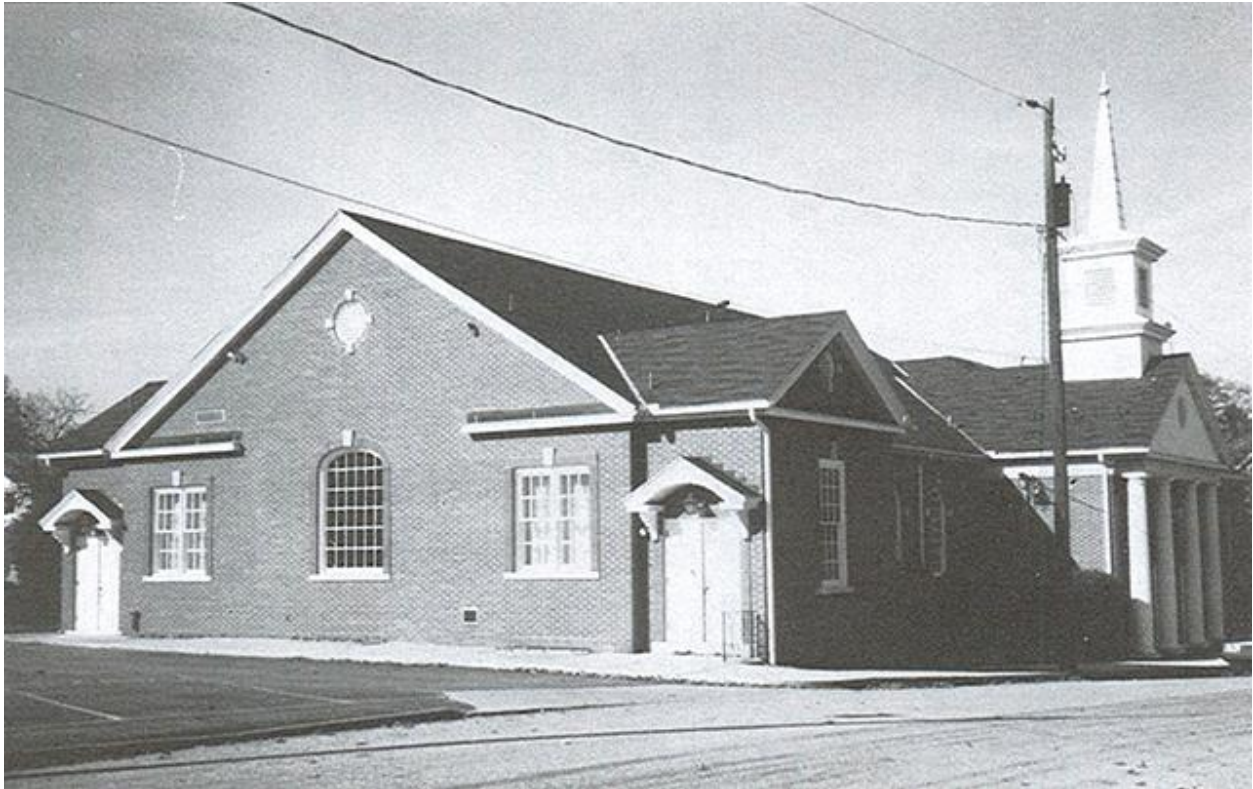
Jesus' Final Week
Monday
Mark 11:12-26
Layne Lebo
March 5, 2023

This year during Lent, we're focusing on "Jesus' Final Week." Last week, we explored Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday just four days prior to his arrest, and we'll conclude in four weeks with Good Friday. Today we'll be looking at Holy Monday—the day Jesus cleared the temple of all those who were buying and selling in it. Immediately after the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, Mark did a bit of foreshadowing for the next day. In verse 11 of Mark chapter 11 we read, "Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve."

Before we look at what Jesus did on Holy Monday, I want to call your attention to a verse in this passage that's very important in the history of our church. In Mark 11:17, Jesus said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" That verse was the text for our church's dedicatory sermon on November 2, 1890 at 500 South Marble Street—the first church building of the Mechanicsburg Brethren in Christ Church.



The building on the screen won't look familiar to you because it was remodeled in 1964, but many of you might recognize this picture:



That church building is located just a quarter of a mile northeast of here, next to the large cemetery in Mechanicsburg. It's currently the home of the Apostolic Faith Church. McBIC met at that location from the building's dedication in 1890 until March 1992, when we moved to our present location.

A meeting house was first constructed at the High and Marble Street site in 1890, but the actual origins of our church go back further several decades. In his history of our church, titled "A Century on the Hill," author Morris Sherk notes that Brethren in Christ people moved into Cumberland County in the early 1800s, several decades after the founding of our denomination in Lancaster County. Since church buildings were rare at that time, Brethren in Christ people rotated meeting at various farms throughout the county for worship services.



At some point in the mid to late 19th Century, the worship services held in Mechanicsburg began being held at a church building in the town of Mechanicsburg known as The Union Church, which was constructed in 1825. The Union Church building still stands at 51 East Main Street, next door to the Washington Fire Company. It's the oldest building in our town.

I find it inspiring that over a century and a quarter ago at the dedication of our church's first meeting house, Reverend Noah Zook was led by the Holy Spirit to remind the crowd that was gathered that day of God's purpose for his church. Amidst all the things that a church might be led to focus on, Reverend Zook felt led to remind the people gathered that day that God's house was first and foremost to be a place of prayer for all nations. As Jesus said, in Mark 11:17: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

It's a blessing for me to be able to stand in front of you today and tell you that McBIC is a praying church. Our prayer room, prayer groups that regularly meet, formational prayer ministry, pastors' prayer teams, and the commitment of many within our church to pray are foundational to who we are and all we do. This is a house of prayer. However, as my friend John Brubaker reminds me, Jesus

didn't end his statement with, "a house of prayer." He said, "a house of prayer for all nations." Jesus' heart for his Church was and is that people of all nations or ethnicities would be blessed by his church—big C—and by our local congregation here at 1050 South York Street. While the Mechanicsburg community in which we're located is growing in ethnic diversity, our community is predominantly white, and our church family, while also growing in diversity, in large part reflects the community in which we're located. Additionally, our church has a long history of seeing missionaries called from our church family to world missions in places ranging from Africa to Asia to South and Central America, as well as various spots within North America. We're also blessed at this time to host Spanish and Nepali church families, both of which hold services in our church on Sundays after we finish meeting for worship. 132 years after our church was founded, God continues to bless McBIC as a house of prayer for all nations.

I'd like to return now to Jesus' actions on the Monday of holy week. I noted last Sunday that Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was filled with prophetic imagery demonstrating the kind of Messiah He was. Early on Monday, Jesus performs another prophetic act that, at the time, seemed strange but makes more sense in retrospect. I encourage you to follow along as I read Mark 11: 12–14.

The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard him say it.

At first glance, Jesus' cursing of the fig tree makes no sense. He was hungry. He saw a fig tree in the distance, so He went to examine it to see if it had any figs on it. The tree had nothing but leaves on it, because it wasn't the season for figs. Then Jesus cursed the fig tree and said, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." What's going on here? Was Jesus simply agitated because He was hungry, and so he cursed the fig tree? On Tuesday morning, following his clearing of the temple, Jesus and his disciples walked by the fig tree again and saw that it had withered from the roots up. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree symbolized how He viewed the temple: withered, dead and unfruitful, failing to fulfill its design of being a place where people could worship God.

Now we turn to Jesus' main action on Monday of his final week. I'll begin reading at verse 15 of Mark chapter 11:

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches

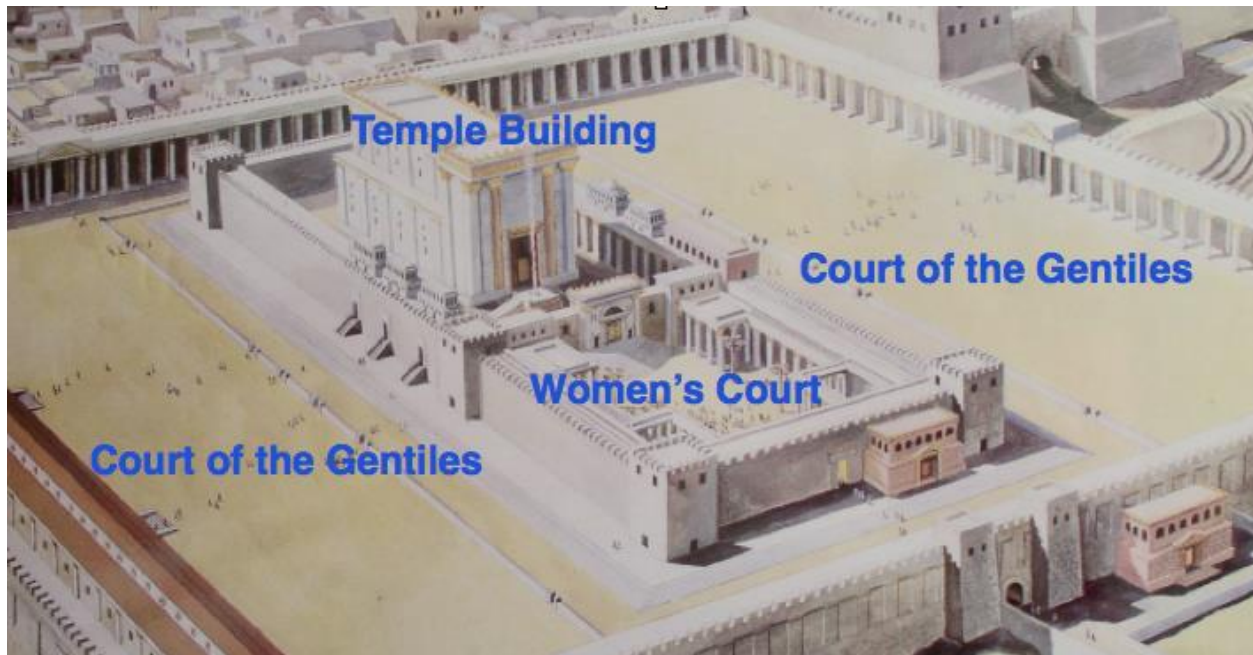
of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Jesus’ clearing of the temple was one of his most significant acts. It’s one of the relatively few events in Jesus’ life and ministry recorded by all four Gospel writers. Mark, as is his style, writes about this event very concisely. Remember that at the end of the day on Sunday, after his grand entrance riding into Jerusalem on a donkey with palm branches being waved and clothes and branches covering the path before Him and crowds of people shouting, “Hosanna,” Jesus went into the temple courts and looked around. His clearing of the temple on Monday wasn’t a spontaneous outburst that Jesus couldn’t control because of his intense anger. It was a premeditated act designed to “reclaim” the temple for his Father’s intended purposes.

To help put what Jesus did in the temple in context, I’d like to take a quick look at the design of the temple area. There were four main areas in the temple: The Court of the Gentiles, The Women’s Court, The Temple Building itself, and within the Temple Building, the Holy of Holies. Most of us are probably familiar with the caste system in India—a system that groups people in clusters from those in extreme poverty to those with massive wealth. Jewish society didn’t have a formal caste system, but there were clear distinctions between women and men, between Gentiles and Jews, and between religious leaders and the laity, and nowhere were these distinctions more strongly felt than in religion. The diagram on the screens gives a general overview of the layout of the temple area.



Remember, as I pointed out in last week's sermon, that Jerusalem was bursting at the seams during this week, because of the Passover celebration. Pilgrims from all over the world had descended on the Holy City to celebrate the most important of Jewish holidays, and so undoubtedly, the temple court was much fuller than normal with worshipers who had traveled long distances. Likewise, the Court of the Gentiles was also filled with more merchants than normal, looking to make a profit off the traveling pilgrims. As we read this account, we might picture a modern-day market or bazaar. If you've been to foreign countries, you may have seen markets where all kinds of food and handmade goods are being sold, or perhaps you've attended Mechanicsburg's Jubilee Day festival. That's not exactly what was happening here. The vendors in the temple courts were selling oxen, doves, and sheep to the pilgrims to be used in their worship as sacrifices. Individuals, couples and families had traveled great distances to come to Jerusalem, and it wasn't practical for those traveling long distances to bring their live sacrifices with them. So, the common practice was to purchase them in the temple courts. Not only was this area filled with people, smells, noises, and activity that made worshipping a challenge, some of the vendors were no doubt selling the sacrifices at exorbitant prices and gouging the buyers, who had little choice but to buy their sacrifices there.

Jesus' act of driving out those who were buying and selling and overturning the tables of the money changers was fueled by two frustrations. First, people seeking to worship God were being hindered in their worship. Those of you who have been to Jubilee or some other carnival or festival—can you imagine trying to carve out space to read the Bible, worship, pray, or quietly meditate? With all

the activity occurring around you, it would be a challenge. Jesus was upset that religious pilgrims who desired to worship God were being bombarded with noise and distraction in the only part of the temple where they could worship.

Secondly, Jesus was frustrated, because turning the temple courts into a marketplace was dishonoring God's character. God's heart was for all people to be able to worship Him and know Him, but the area designated for non-Jews had been transformed into something other than an area for worship. In John's account of this event, the disciples remembered the words of Psalm 69, "Zeal for your house will consume me," and they connected Jesus' actions in clearing the temple with the words of that Psalm. In his book "Fight Like Jesus," Jason Porterfield points out that Jewish Law at that time prohibited those with physical deformities from entering the temple area at all, but in Matthew's account of Jesus' clearing of the temple, he notes that immediately after the buyers and sellers were driven out of the temple area by Jesus, the blind and the lame entered the temple court area, and Jesus healed them. Jesus' act of clearing the temple brought honor to God's name and character and immediately opened the door for people who had been forbidden to enter the temple area to worship God.

Much time has passed, and our circumstances are very different than when Jesus cleared the temple court area of the buyers and sellers and doves and livestock nearly 2,000 years ago, but Jesus' desire for his Church hasn't changed. His words then are just as appropriate for us today as they were then: "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

21st Century American churches do a lot of stuff. We educate and disciple children, teens, and adults, and we seek to share the gospel with those who don't know Jesus. We hold weekly worship services. We host prayer meetings. Committees, task forces, and church boards do the work of the church. We have benevolent ministries for people struggling with material needs. We provide community for people through small groups and Sunday School classes. We hold meals, fundraisers, and benefits. Outside groups use our facilities for banquets and meetings. We plan community outreach events. We serve Communion, dedicate infants and children, baptize people, accept members, and perform weddings and funerals. Churches do a lot of stuff.

Amidst all that activity, it's easy for us to get off track and find ourselves focusing our attention on ancillary activities rather than the core work the church is called to. To people on the outside, churches are notorious for fixating on our folks, our finances, and our facilities while ignoring or being oblivious to the needs all around us.

In Jesus' day, business and commerce had displaced worship as the priority in the temple courts, and a commitment to keeping impure people from contaminating others stood in the way of people God loved from other cultures and people who were sick or disabled being able to reach Him. We live in a different era and our circumstances have changed, but it's just as easy for us to lose sight of what's most important to Jesus as it was for 1st Century Jews.

In Mark chapter 12, a passage we'll look at next week, Jesus was asked by a religious leader who was trying to trick Him into saying something that would get Him trouble, "What's the most important commandment?" He replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And the second is like it, love your neighbor as you love yourself." Love God and love people. When Jesus cleared the temple on Holy Monday with the words, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers,'" He was essentially saying the same thing: "Love and worship God and love and serve all people."

My hope and prayer for my life, for you as individuals who are here this morning, and for McBIC as a whole is that in our lives and through our church, we will live out the words of Jesus preached at our church's dedication service 132 years ago. "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."