

John 2:13-22 (NRSV)

13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables.

15 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.

16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"

21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body.

22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Be Holy !

Let me share my story. It is the story of when I was a teenager. It happened when I was in middle school in Paraguay. (At that time, learning Spanish was difficult for me, to follow the class, so when learning English, I was almost out of my mind. However, I had a desire to learn English too.)

There were two institutes(or academies) where one could learn English in Paraguay: the American Cultural Center (CCPA: Centro Cultural Paraguayo Americano) and the British Institute (ANGLO: La Asociación Cultural Paraguayo Británica).

One day, my friends started arguing with each other, and their issue was this:

"Which one is the right spelling.... center or centre?"

I didn't know much English at the time, but somehow I thought center was the right word. So I said, "I think center is right. I think I saw it at the airport, I think I saw it in the book." My friend who studied at the American Cultural Center said yes. Then my friend who studied at ANGLO says that center is still wrong, and the discussion began.

It would have been easy to end it by simply acknowledging that there are some differences between the English spoken in the UK and the US. But the debate didn't end with an accepting argument. Since middle school students didn't have English classes then, we decided to ask our high school English teacher.

The high school English teacher explained that the British use centre and the Americans use center.

However, their argument didn't stop(there).

My friend who studies at ANGLO said that Britain is correct because Britain is the ancestor of the United States and has a longer history than the USA. Then a friend studying at the American Cultural Center said that the United States was right because it was a bigger and more powerful nation than the UK and other nations. And so the argument went on and on.

Actually, there was a reason they were arguing like that, and it was to get me to take sides with them. It was a fight/argument between my friends to make me choose between British English and American English.

The essence of the situation was that I made a choice about learning English, and that choice became a place of contention between friends about whether British or American English was better.

(I preferred CENTER rather than CENTRE for no reason, which is why I later spent a few months studying English at the American Council on American Culture.)

The purpose was to get advice from friends about learning a language, but I also remember two of my friends were taking such a strong position about the differences between British English and American English. [so hard on the side of the US and the UK.]

That story of many years ago came to mind because of a thought I had while meditating on today's Bible Readings.

The reason we worship God is to meet with God. The reason God allowed us to worship was for the purpose of an intimate relationship with God.

(Slow)

From Genesis through the first half of Exodus, we see Abraham, his descendants, and the people of Israel offering sacrifices to God. But, how these sacrifices were made were largely improvised because they were in the wilderness with no temple or synagogue in which to worship. They set up where they were to worship God and made their sacrifices with what they had available. But through the book of Leviticus, the time and place where the Israelites would meet God was now set. The temple became the place where God became a God that humans could meet at a predictable time and place. The temple, the worship, was God's way of creating a place for the Israelites to meet and communicate with God so that they would no longer be idolaters in front of a golden calf.

The purpose of the temple, this beautiful place to meet God, was to worship God, but the people interpreted that meaning differently.

Why were they selling animals at the entrance to the temple? Maybe it was for the convenience of bringing animals for sacrifice.

Why did the temple need a money changer? Perhaps because it was considered unclean to bring the Roman currency to God, which was the main currency of that time.

As non-essential things begin to enter the temple, it no longer becomes a place to meet God, but became a place to fulfill human needs.

Why do we worship God? To manipulate God?

This is what happened in the temple when we forgot the essence of worship.

A prophet named Jeremiah tells us that what God wanted from the Israelites was obedience, not sacrifices or offerings. In other words, if there was anything more important than sacrifices and offerings, it was hearing and following God's word.

Therefore, the most important thing in worship is to be "holy." When we are holy, God can reach out to us and communicate with us. That communication is not through our offerings or possessions. It is when we hear and obey God's voice that we become holy.

During the Lenten season, we meditate and remember Jesus. Jesus is especially important to us because he brings us back into communication with God.

By the holiness of Jesus' life, he makes us realize that God loves us. This is the essence of the gospel: that through Jesus we are no longer children of darkness, but children of God.

And, it teaches us that Jesus is the true temple.

Let's go back to the story at the beginning.

The essence of language is to communicate. Pronunciation and spelling are somehow secondary. But as a for non-native English speaker, I sometimes find that the focus is not on learning English, but on sharing which style of English is more beneficial. Again, it's a result of forgetting the essence.

Language is not for me, it's for the other person. Instead of speaking other languages, I speak English because of you. That's what a worship service is about: it's not about me, it's about the other person, and it's about God. In that sense, I think language captures the most important essence of worship, because it's not about me, it's about communication, it's about others.

Let's imagine if Jesus were here today. We'd probably all look at Him with great excitement - we'd see His love for us overflowing. But He doesn't speak English, so He communicates with us in ancient Aramaic or ancient Hebrew in front of us... how sad would that be?

Now let's get to the end of the sermon.

So, what happens when we become holy? Rabbi Jonathan says at the beginning of his book Leviticus

If God created the world and made it for humans to inhabit, then humans created holy space and time so that God can dwell with us.

The more holy you and I become, the more deeply God's love will be revealed through us.

So what is holiness? How do we become holy?

(I could start another whole sermon. Do you want it?) I'll try to answer that very briefly today, but I want you to remember. I think we become holy by living with the mind of Jesus. When your path becomes unclear, think What would Jesus do. WWJD (What would Jesus do?) is a beautiful initiative(or way) to invite God into our lives by making us holy. Let us pray.

God, you loved us, so you made the world and made us to live in it. God, you loved us, and sent Jesus to give us a new way. God, grant that we may be holy, so that you may show us the world that you love it through us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.