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## Indiana Jesus And The Temple Of Doom

Texts:; **1 Corinthians 1: 18-25; John 2: 13-22; *The Crazy Ones*** by Rob Siltanen (and others on Apple's Think Different Campaign)

Probably the most famous man with a whip is Indiana Jones.

Everybody over fifty remembers the great scene from 1981's Raiders of the Lost Ark, (was it really 1981? Oh my goodness!) when Indy is in the middle of a chase and the crowd parts to show Indy confronted by a huge scimitar wielding Arab blocking his way. The audience is ready for a great fight between Indy's famous whip and the intimidating Arab's scimitar, when Indy calmly reaches to his belt, grabs a hitherto unseen gun, and dispenses with his opponent in one shot. Indy turns his back, and continues the chase. No one was expecting that, and it made for an unforgettable moment. Everybody remembers that Indy didn't use his whip in that scene.

But an even more unforgettable moment came when Jesus *did* use his whip. That's what we heard today! And it's shocking! Wow, I mean, just, wow! If that text doesn't make you think again about Jesus, I'm not sure what will! This just isn't the picture we usually have in our heads about Jesus, the guy with the whip, and that's really the great thing about it. It reminds us once again that there is so much more to Jesus than the shorthand images that we use to store him up safely in our minds, that our culture imposes on him to make him safe and inoffensive. He's always threatening to break out, to become someone *difficult* – and anyone who came into any of our churches and turned the dinner tables upside down, or threw the collection plates out the stained-glass windows would be, pretty much by definition, someone difficult. Despite all our attempts to tame him, Jesus refuses to stay in the cage. He barges into our lives over and over again, turning some things upside down and driving other things out, things that don't belong there. Lent is a prime time for Jesus to do his barging in and his driving out and his turning over. Easter is about bringing new life, and you can't get ready for new life unless you do a thorough cleaning out of the old life. It's like trying to put new wine into old wineskins, and all that, as Jesus once said. It doesn't work. The old skins burst and the new wine spills, and then you don't have new wine or old wineskins.

But if Jesus is going to barge into our lives with a whip, we'd better understand what he's doing. We'd better take a closer look at this text. So why does the Temple look like a 4-H club at an agricultural fair in the first place? And why is there an ATM in the Temple, or at least bankers' tables? What is all this stuff doing in the Temple? Well, it's all there because it has to be! Or, at least, it has to be there to keep on doing worship the way it's always been done, and that meant offering sacrifices. To offer sacrifices to God, you need *unblemished* animals. That means without a spot on them, without a cut, a scrape, a bruise, a ruffled feather or an out of place tuft

of fur – unblemished, spotless, perfect. Of course, you could bring your own from home. But have you ever tried to walk the 63 miles from Galilee to Jerusalem with a goat or an ox without it getting cut or scraped along the road by a sharp stone or a wayward bramble? Have you ever tried that? No, of course you haven't! You'd probably be taken to a mental health center for evaluation if you tried to do that! And I haven't either, but we both know that it would be hard. It would be much easier if someone else had animals raised nearby that you could just buy when you got there. Hence the animals. They were there for the sacrifices the pilgrims wanted to make to God. Worship of God required sacrifice, and this bestiary here in the court of the Gentiles is there for that very purpose. How very convenient! But if you were going to buy an animal, you had to have money. And the money you probably had was Roman money, and Roman money had the inconvenient feature of having the graven image of an emperor on it, and possibly an inscription declaring him divine. You couldn't possibly buy a sacred animal for the one and only true God with a graven image of a person claiming to be a god. There were commandments about that sort of thing, after all, as I'm sure you remember. So you had to change your Roman money for Temple money, because Temple money had no such graven images on it. And you needed Temple money to pay your Temple tax anyway, so why not kill two sacrificial birds with one stone? That's why the money changers were there. It was a needed service for the service of God. It was all very pious, and if piety also made a handsome profit, well, who's to say what exploitation is anyway?

But the larger point is, the whole sacrificial system depended on these things being readily available. You needed the money to buy the animals to offer the sacrifice to atone for your sins to be made right with God to have hope for a blessing in this life and beyond. That's what the sacrificial system did. And the whole sacrificial system was about to become unnecessary. Everything Jesus does makes this abundantly clear. The animals must go because Jesus is the one great sacrifice, once and for all, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. These animals aren't needed anymore because the Passover Lamb is about to be sacrificed in the very person of Jesus. Jesus is going to die for the sins of the world; no more animals will be necessary. And the money changers aren't necessary because the salvation that Jesus is going to work cannot be bought, cannot be bargained for, cannot be haggled over, but comes as a gift to all people, through faith.

The court of the Gentiles, where all this happened, is the outermost court of the Temple, and it's too full of banking and bleating for any Gentiles to get in. The Court of the Gentiles has to be cleaned up because there needs to be a place for the Gentiles to come and worship God, a place not smelling like a barn and clinking like a bank, since the Gentiles are going to be part of God's chosen people after Jesus has completed his work on the cross. So Jesus cleaned it out. With a whip. It was the only way because the system was so entrenched, the people were so sure that what they were doing was right and sufficient that without a shock to the system, bureaucratic and human, nothing was ever going to change. And this text gives *us* a shock to the system, too, reminding us that Jesus is quite prepared to take a whip to us in order to save us. "Get that life cleaned out," Jesus says, "I'm coming through. Don't you dare think of me as so meek and mild

that you can do just anything and call yourselves my disciples. I shook up the Temple, I'll sure as shootin' not hesitate to shake up the church."

So Jesus wants us to clean out of our lives everything that keeps us from him. He wants our hearts and minds to be places of pure worship, where we acknowledge with gratitude the sacrifice that he has made for us. He wants us to accept his gift of salvation with faith, but not just any old dead faith that doesn't change us, doesn't turn us upside down, but with a faith that reorganizes all our priorities and shocks our system into becoming, gasp, more like him! It's all too easy to ignore gentle Jesus, meek and mild. He's a loving house pet, to be kept in his place, a Caspar Milquetoast we can walk all over. Too many people think like the great German poet Heinrich Heine, who never had much time for God in his life, and who said on his deathbed, "Of course God will forgive me. It's his job."

And this text shatters that image and gives us instead Jesus with a whip, a formidable figure not to be ignored or disdained, and certainly not to be walked on. But this, this is the Jesus I want to go into the world with, not the wimpy Jesus that's nothing like the one true and living God in human flesh. This is the Jesus who can really help me, and help the world, a Jesus of power and might. This is the Jesus who demands justice for all our neighbors, racial justice, gender justice, economic justice. This is the Jesus who can change the world for good by bringing down all the entrenched power that stands in the way of a radical love that treats people who are different from us as part of our family.

Jesus can help me to make those changes happen in the world. But first I have to make sure he's on my side, or rather, that I am on his. First I have to let him clean out my own life with his disturbing power, and fill me up with his unsettling Spirit. And first we have to let him shake up our church so that the old ways aren't getting in the way of the new movement of God's Spirit among us. And that, I pray, is what he is doing for all of us here this morning. Jesus was one of the crazy ones who thought he could change the world. He was right about that. Now Jesus with a whip thinks that we can be crazy like him, and change the world some more. And you know what? I think he's right about that, too. Amen