

061321 Mark 11:15-19

*Gospel of Mark series: "Too Comfortable"*

It's Sunday morning. You drive to church, and pull into your normal parking spot. You greet a few good friends as you come in the doors. You settle into your favorite pew, because every other pew is not as good as your pew. You lean back, you close your eyes, you listen to the excellent pre-service music. You say a little prayer of thanks for your beautiful church. You're at peace. It's comfortable here, isn't it?

How would you feel if your comfortable Sunday church time was interrupted? A person walks in, makes a scene, and tries to kick all of us out? That would be awful. That would be upsetting.

That would be Jesus, in our Gospel story. Jesus walks in the temple: the Jerusalem temple, the place where God dwells with his people, the holiest place in the world. Jesus walks in, and he's upset by what he sees. Greedy, money-hungry profiteers taking advantage of others. People who are supposedly worshipping God, but they're way too nonchalant and unconcerned about their sinful condition. Men and women who are overly-ritualistic, thoughtlessly going through the motions. Jesus sees people who are who are fakes and hypocrites. And all of these people are quite comfortable with what they're doing, and how they're acting. All of them are imagine, or pretend, that their religious practices and their spiritual traditions are perfectly pleasing to God.

Well, Jesus is God. And he's not pleased. He raises his voice. He raises a ruckus. Jesus grabs their attention. He makes those people stop being so comfortable. Jesus wants them to start taking their sinful condition, start taking their

religion, start taking their connection with God much more seriously.

Imagine Jesus walks into Hope Lutheran Church in Wake Forest today. What does he see, in us? How does he feel, about the sincerity of our worship, about the purity of our hearts? Does he smile and proudly pat us all on the back? Or does Jesus warn us about being too comfortable? Does the Lord walk in to our temple today, and say, "Start taking your sinful condition, start taking your religion, start taking your connection with God much more seriously?"

Jesus' goal, when he walked in the temple that day, was not to make the people more comfortable. He wanted them less comfortable, less smug. He wanted them more genuine, more heartfelt about their worship.

Do you think he wants anything different from us? Christ's goal is not to make us all super-comfortable. He never says, "Follow me, and I'll make sure you're always content and relaxed." Rather, he says, "Take up your cross and follow me." Jesus never says, "You're perfectly fine just the way you are." Jesus says, "Be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."

I don't think the Lord cares which pew you sit in. But I do think he wants us all to squirm in our seats sometimes. We come to church, and it's a really good thing to be able to enjoy the friendships, the music, the architecture, the warmth and love we feel here. But sometimes, when we're here, the Word of God hits us hard, exposes our sin, challenges our thinking. Church isn't always a comfort zone, is it? Our religion isn't supposed to make us too comfortable.

See, our church and our religion – these are not the be-all and end-all to anything. Going to church doesn't make you right with God. And being religious here doesn't make you forgiven, or saved – any more than the Jerusalem Temple

and the sacrifices there fixed everything for the people in Jesus' day.

Our church and our religion are really just a gateway to something way more important. It's your personal connection with God that really matters. God sees your heart. God knows your mind. God knows how sincere you are toward him. God knows when you say one thing here, and do another thing out there. God knows every sin, every infidelity, every mistake. God knows my all failings and shortcomings, too.

But God loves me still, and God loves you. He wants you close to him, and he welcomes you here in his house. He wants us all to hear, again and again, how he sent his Son into this world to live a perfect, pure life on our behalf; and then to die as the ultimate, final sacrifice in our place. God wants us to cherish the Gospel treasure he gives us here week after week, that Christ Jesus, by his life and death and resurrection, has made us right with God. He wants us to pay attention to his Laws, too, and to be more committed to following his will consistently. God wants us to keep growing in our faith, to be always mindful of our relationship with him, to be sincere and authentic when we're worshipping him here and when we're living for him out there.

Jesus walks in to our church today. What does he see in you? How does he feel about our worship, about our faith, about our daily discipleship walk?

Let me leave you with a little story today. Actually, it's a story about a skit. I've seen, a number of times, these two very funny Christian comedians called *The Skit Guys*. They've appeared at the National Youth Gathering many times, I've seen them on YouTube; and I've enjoyed how they use humor to drive home Biblical messages.

One of their skits is called "God's Chisel." One man stands there, talking about how much he loves God, but how sorry he is for his sins. Then the other man walks up, playing the part of God. God tells the guy standing there that he loves him, how he sent his Son just for him, and how he considers him his own masterpiece. The guy is overwhelmed by God's love. He's grateful and appreciative.

And then God says, "But I still have some work to do on you, man. You're a masterpiece; but I want you to be perfect. So I'm just going to do a little chiseling here, and a little more chiseling there. I'm going to keep working on you. It might not be comfortable for you. But know that I'm the one shaping you, and cleansing you, because I truly love you."

*The Skit Guys* act this out in a very funny way; but their skit makes a serious point. God's goal is not for us to be too comfortable in our own skin. God's goal is for us to be more and more connected to him in our church, in our religion, in our hearts.

May God bless you all today. May God bless our wonderful church. And may God bless our heartfelt worship this day! In the name of Jesus. Amen.