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November 13, 2022

Trump's Pledge Card

1 Kings 5: 1-14 | John 2: 12-22

Among the curiosities in scripture that some folks take a bit too literally are lists of building materials used for major ancient projects. The book of Genesis, for example, contains a spec sheet for Noah's construction of the ark. "And God said to Noah...Make yourself an ark of cypress wood." God said that it should be three hundred cubits long, fifty cubits wide, and thirty cubits tall. God also specified that it should have a roof, exactly three decks, and a door. Those instructions sound a little vague to me, but they were detailed enough for one man in Williamstown, Kentucky to build a replica exactly as God had designed it. The local Chamber of Commerce says it brings at least a million tourists a year to the area. So make it your family's next vacation.

Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem is another example of a Biblical public works project. It's too bad they haven't built a temple in Kentucky because the spec sheet in the book of Kings is much more detailed than the instructions for the ark. Chapters 5 through 7 of Kings consist of granular descriptions of the new temple, the palace, and other administrative buildings for the court of the unified monarchy. Solomon's predecessor, David, had been too consumed in battle, conflict inside his own court as well as relentless external wars, to focus on public works. But the succession of Solomon to the throne brings a period of stability and prosperity that will become the golden age of Israel's history. According to the historian, the House of the Lord was sixty cubits long and twenty cubits wide, thirty cubits high. There was an outer vestibule, and inside there was a grand nave

with an inner sanctuary. The temple was to be a sacred place for prayer and for worship, which would include offering sacrifices. The Hebrew tradition was concerned with purity for ritual purposes, so great care was taken not to soil the sacred spaces throughout the construction process. Legend has it that all the stone had to be carved and finished at the quarry so that the harsh sounds of hammers and stone cutters would never pierce the holy spaces. The inner sanctuary was finished with olive wood; the floors were cypress; and the nave was detailed with richly ornamented cedar. Some of the surfaces were finished with gold.

The historian suggests that Solomon's ambitions to build the temple led to Israel's treaty with the kingdom of Tyre, which was rich in cedar and cypress timber. The seafaring Phoenecian states like Tyre also had rafts and boats to move materials efficiently. Here we come to one of the interesting details of the *Women's Lectionary*. It's not at all uncommon for us to read in scripture the lists of materials and the specifications for major projects such as the ark or the temple. But the selection of this passage brings our focus to the sourcing of these materials. Where did the materials come from? By what means of transportation? How were they paid for? Who provided the labor? These are the kinds of questions that the *Women's Lectionary* is very concerned with - and in this instance, Wilda Gafney doesn't want us to avert our gaze from the answers. After describing Solomon's treaty with King Hiram, the text continues for two more verses: "King Solomon conscripted forced labor out of all Israel; the levy numbered thirty thousand men. He sent them to the Lebanon, ten thousand a month in shifts; they would be a month in the Lebanon and two months at home; Adoniram was in charge of the forced labor."

The irony here is rich: a sacred temple built by forced labor. The temple was to be so pure that it couldn't be spoiled by the sounds of hammers and chisels. Would it not be soiled by the suffering of the workers? Would it not be soiled by

the cries of women and children left behind by the conscription of thirty thousand men?

This building which was erected with such care and attention to detail, and which was chronicled with such specificity in the biblical history, is the setting of the Jesus's famous tantrum among the moneychangers. You have to imagine that by this time the space is a public square - the temple as a centerpiece of civic architecture and daily life bustling all about it. The portico was an open pavilion where merchants would have gathered with various wares, craftspeople would purvey their services, and livestock would be available for sale. John's text focuses especially on the livestock - animals like doves, sheep, and cattle - probably because merchants would sell these animals for people to make sacrifices inside the temple. They were part of the economy of religious life and ritual. If one wishes to make a sacrifice, you purchase a dove and go inside to the priest.

The Gospel of John uses this scene to establish a critique of the religious power structure, but because of the anti-semitic steps in John's gospel it should be said that the excesses depicted here are not characteristic of Jewish custom. Jesus is the hero of the story that John tells, the singularly righteous correction to a corrupted institution. It's easy enough to point at the sins that Jesus addresses in the text - sacrifices paid for like carnival games, salvation given by the transaction, a class of priests fleecing the working poor. Yet set against the history of the temple and its construction, the outburst of Jesus brings a confrontation not just with what happens in the open spaces but with what is hidden within the walls. Jesus has come to convict not just what happens today but also to redeem what took place in the past. He is here to consecrate what things are and to confess how they came to be. His outrage in the temple is not contempt for Jewish faith and practices; it's a confrontation with any religious practice that does not align the outer expressions with the inner motivations.

This scene is known as one of the few occasions in scripture when Jesus loses his cool. The authenticity of his reaction stands in contrast to the surrounding culture of religious activity that is so lacking in sincerity and so arid of any meaningful commitment.

Believe it or not, a friend of mine used to be the pastor of the church that Donald Trump attended. He loves to tell a very classic Donald Trump story about the time they asked Trump for a gift to the building campaign. They invited Mr. Trump down to tour the sanctuary and take a close look at the cracks in the stained glass and walls in need of paint. The future president seemed to take the visit very seriously. He walked slowly through the space commenting on all that he noticed and making suggestions for lighting and acoustics. Finally at the end of the visit, the minister asked Trump for a contribution. "Pastor," he said, "I just gave you \$100,000 of my time."

I believe that we read this text wrongly when we presume that Jesus's anger toward the moneychangers separates the financial from the spiritual. He drives the money changers away from the temple not because money has no place in the temple but because these resources are not in alignment with God's purposes. He seeks not to condemn the money but to consecrate it. He means that the financial and the spiritual belong together - that our financial decisions are spiritual decisions. Whom to trust? What to hold on to? How to let go? Every day my pocketbook is a parable of my faith. So this scene is the insistence that our whole lives from the bottom up, from the beginning to the end, from the sourcing of the material to the erection of the temple, are lived in attunement with the desires and purposes of God.

That is the invitation that we make with the practice of stewardship. We aren't here to make a show for ourselves of our generous philanthropy. Or to pretend that our own financial lives are somehow more pure than the economy

about the Second Temple. But through our committed practice of prayerful giving, we ask God to bring what we have into God's own uses.

You know, he must have had the money. So why wouldn't Donald Trump make a pledge? Because he doesn't know how to pray.