“My how the tables have turned.” If you “turn the tables” on someone or if a situation’s ‘tables turn’, it is generally understood that you have reversed the fortunes in your favor, to some capacity.

History is filled with many stories where people with many troubles had their tables turned and came back to have successful careers.

Ulysses S. Grant graduated from West Point as an officer but didn’t like his post in the new Oregon territory and being separated from his family. He drank too much, fell into depression and quit the army. He went home and failed at business, as well. He was asked to rejoin the army when the Civil War broke out and was promoted to the top general in the Union army. He then went on to serve two terms as President of the United States. At the time, his memoirs were the best-selling book in American history.

There’s something deep within us as human beings that desires to see the tables turn from negative to positive. Of course, this can depend on what side of the situation you are on. If you were at the Cotton Bowl this year as a Baylor fan, seeing the tables turn in the last two minutes wasn’t such a great feeling; but as a Michigan State fan, it was the greatest outcome possible.

In our text today, we see examples of the odds turning in favor of God’s people. It’s the time of the Passover so many Jews, including Jesus and the disciples, were coming to celebrate and worship God at the Temple.

Because many of them were coming such long distances, they were unable to bring animals with them for the sacrifice and since they were under the leadership of Rome, they would need to exchange their Roman coins for the proper Jewish currency to pay the Temple tax.

Because of this, the religious leaders decided to charge exorbitant and unjust amounts of money for the exchange rate and for animals that were to be sacrificed. In their minds, those leaders were turning the tables in their favor. They were using their knowledge and expertise of the laws of God to
take advantage of those who had made the long journey to Jerusalem to worship God at the Temple.

When Jesus walks in, he immediately knows what’s happening and becomes outraged. He literally turns over the tables of the moneychangers and grabs a whip and runs them out of the Temple.

Can you imagine the madness? The noise, the animals running everywhere scared to death with hay and feed and other undesirable and putrid things flying through the air. Now that I think about it, it reminds me of those cattle sales that my dad took me to when I was a kid. The 3,000 to 4,000 people present were in shock because they had never seen anything like this before. Maybe this is where Spain got the idea for the running of the bulls.

The people think, “What in the world is going on?! Who is this guy confronting the religious leaders?” At the same time I can imagine them cheering and applauding that someone is standing up to these religious leaders for taking advantage of those traveling from far away.

Then all of a sudden, the madness begins to calm down and you can hear a pin drop. “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s House a marketplace!”

Jesus turns the tables by showing that knowing God isn’t about the specific mechanisms of worship and right belief as much as it is about the heart and desire of the worshiper.

Jesus wants everyone to know that God is more interested in our denying ourselves before God and coming to God as living sacrifices than our slitting the throat of an animal. The psalmist writes in Psalm 69, “I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. This will please the Lord more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.”

The people coming to the Temple to celebrate and worship God was an act of worship in itself. They chose to leave behind the family farm or business. They chose to endure the long roads and the hot sun. They chose to put their kids on their back and embrace the journey to Jerusalem. Why? To show their devotion and love for God and their willingness to put themselves aside because of the mighty works God had done in their ancestors’ lives, as well as in their own lives.
Knowing God and having a relationship with God is not about performing the right practices or worshiping a certain way. It’s not about using God to accomplish our own agenda, but about living our lives as daily offerings of worship to God, offering our hearts to God and loving God and his people as best we can each day.

This includes taking a stand when we see injustices taking place and taking action against unjust and disgraceful institutions that are more concerned with money than with the condition and circumstances of a person’s heart and life.

Jesus became angry at the religious leaders because of his love for them and for the Jewish people. Jesus knew these religious leaders needed to be corrected because he loved them and wanted to help them. He didn’t become angry for the sake of being angry.

We know all too well and have seen recently what happens when people become hardliners and fundamental about religious practices. The journey to God becomes more about what we are doing to manipulate God and others than what God is doing in and through us in love and grace.

ISIS is trying to take over the world by killing people because they want all people held to the same letter of the law. They believe that their way is the only way to live that is pleasing to God. They are trying to manipulate the return of Jesus and the apocalypse by establishing the Islamic State.

When Christians speak in absolutes—like we’re the ones that have life and God figured out and everyone else has to learn from us—we can do damage as well. There’s no one right way to follow God other than the way of love for God and for all people. If anything we do is outside the spirit of God’s love, then we ourselves are outside the love of God.

Disagreement is natural when the mystery of God is involved. We can’t become angry and hateful when people may disagree with us.

It’s great to be at a church that values women in ministry and accepts people no matter what their religious background. But we must all be cautious about judging others and feeling superior or farther along on our faith journeys than people who disagree with us. When the focus is on Jesus and not on being right, the tables can be turned.
Since it was quite obvious that Jesus disagreed with the selling of animals in the Temple, the religious leaders questioned Jesus by what authority he was doing this and by what sign he was going to show that he, in fact, had the authority.

Jesus’ response sounded absurd and the religious leaders made sure he knew it. You're going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days? C’mon! Herod’s been working on this thing for 46 years and he still isn’t finished. What makes you think you can rebuild it in three days?

It’s like someone saying they’re going to destroy Wilshire and rebuild it in three days. There’s no way that anything like that could ever happen. It would take three days just to change the light bulbs, much less rebuild the whole church. It seems impossible, but Jesus is turning the tables once again.

He not only turns the tables on the leaders’ understanding of how to relate to God, but also on their understanding of the Temple and its relation to God. The Temple is not a building that is built by human hands and it is no longer the centerpiece of worship. Instead, the centerpiece of the worship of God is now in Jesus who is God incarnate.

Today we can be hard on these first century Jews because of their belief of God residing in the Temple and separate from the rest of their lives. However, there is a danger for all of us to think about this building as the dwelling place of God.

We come to God’s house, the church, on Sunday mornings, and maybe Wednesdays, to learn about and worship God. We must be careful and remember that our lives are acts of worship to God all the time, not just when we’re inside these walls.

When we follow Jesus, we are to embody the Temple who is Christ and live lives based on love. We can do this because the same Jesus who was God-incarnate living with the Jewish people, is also God-incarnate with us as the living Christ who raised himself from the dead.

When Jesus was raised, the disciples remembered this occurrence in the Temple and believed.

In this season of Lent, we spend time focusing on fasting, repentance of sin, and reflecting on the greatness of Jesus. In our fasting and repentance we look forward and remember and reflect on the hope the resurrection offers.
Because of the resurrection, Jesus is walking beside you as you battle your sickness. He is your presence of peace in your moments of worry and anxiety. Because the tables have turned, there is opportunity even in the midst of struggle.

Just like the disciples looked back, remembered and believed, we look forward to Easter to remember and believe and put our trust in Jesus who is living and walking with us because we can't possibly make it through the ups and downs of life alone.

In the movie *The Imitation Game*, the Germans are winning the war and Alan Turing is recruited along with several others to try and crack the Enigma code to help the Allies win the war. Turing tells us that all the messages are floating in the air for anyone to grab; the problem is that they are encrypted and there are trillions of possibilities and it would take 20 million years to try all of them. This is unfortunate because the Germans reset the code each night at midnight.

Turing knows the complexity of Enigma and knows that there’s no way humans alone can solve the Enigma code. They are going to need something with much greater power. Spoiler alert...Turing goes on to build a machine, the first computer, like which many of you have in your pocket or purse today.

God knew that humans alone, by our own power, were never going to be able to overcome sin and death and be reconciled back to God. So, because of God’s love, Jesus came as God incarnate, to turn the tables and be the new Temple, destroyed and rebuilt for you and for me.

Is your marriage in a rough place? The tables can be turned. Are you unhappy at work? The tables can be turned. Harboring hate or judgment in your heart? The tables can be turned.

The good news is that no matter what our circumstances in life, that because of the resurrection (the greatest turning of tables in history) your tables too can be turned.

The resurrection allows us to find rest in Christ but also energizes us to live abundant and free lives because we have a hope in a living Christ who has turned the tables and offered us his love and grace.

Jesus saves us by turning the tables. From legalism and judgment to love and justice. From religion to relationship. From fear to faith.
From anxiety to trust. From war to peace. From death to life.

My, my, my how the tables have turned. Amen.