

As I thought about today's lessons, I wondered how you would feel if you came to church and your pew was taken or closed off so that you could not sit there. I think most of us would sit in a different pew, but some of may not appreciate that.

In my first church, we had a church group visiting us that was made up of youth and adults and I told them that they could sit in the front since they were a large group and they were leading worship. It made perfect sense to me but I did not realize how much that decision would upset others. One family's pew was taken up by the last row from this group and so there were a number of young ladies sitting in the pew. The father of this family went down to his pew and made the girls move back one row so that he could sit in his pew.

I never intended to upset him and I still don't fully understand why he was so upset, but it happened. If I remember correctly, the reasoning behind having the people move out of his pew had to do with the fact that his family has been sitting in the pew since before Noah.

In our gospel reading for today, we see an emotion out of Jesus that we normally do not see. Jesus went to the temple to worship God and probably do a little teaching and as he entered, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves to be used for sacrifices. There were also money changers seated at tables and Jesus made a whip of cords and drove the animals out of the temple and overturned the tables of the money changers and dumped their coins.

Jesus was clearly upset, but not just because somebody was sitting in his seat. The sellers and money changers were doing a couple of things that upset Jesus. First, they were cheating the people. The people were supposed to offer sacrifices to God and were forced to pay the prices that were demanded and those prices were often inflated. They had no choice because sacrifices were demanded by God at that time and the people had to pay whatever price they were given.

The second issue was that the sellers and money changers set up their booths in the ONLY area that women and children could worship. If they were able to find a place to worship God alongside of the animals; then their worship experience probably was not very quiet because you had the noise from the animals as well as from the people doing the transactions.

Unfortunately, most of the women and children were not able to worship because there was any room. They were denied worship so that others could make money by cheating people.

Let's not even deal with the cheating. How would you feel if you came to worship and the only place that you could worship was closed and no other accommodations were made for you? That is why Jesus got so upset. People were denied worship. They were left out.

Today, churches work really hard to help people feel at ease during worship. They work to help people have a positive worship so that they can experience God. The reason we do this is so that people are not left out.

Here at Immanuel, we want all people to feel welcome and have a positive experience while worshipping with us. Every one of us comes here broken and in need of God's grace. We are fed and strengthened through the word and sacrament as God reaches out to each one of us.

There is a place for all in God's church. A place for us to gather and support one another as God equips us for HIS ministry.