

Sermon Sunday 07.03.21

Today's gospel passage is perhaps one of the best known for being the depiction of angry Jesus! The Jesus who rages turns over tables, who shouts and casts out the money changers. It is one of those stories that we talk about when we talk about justice, when we talk about what is right and wrong, when we justify our own anger, we often say remember Jesus handover tables too... And yes, the story is one where Christ's actions act yes as inspiration but also as a challenge to be wholehearted.

As ever to understand what was happening, we perhaps need to understand the situation that Jesus was in... because Jesus enters into a temple where people are selling animals and people are changing money. Things which should not take place in a temple right? Things that we think of as bad or wrong were taking place! A temple shouldn't be a place where things are bought or sold. They certainly shouldn't be a place where people are cheated and have money changed for them. Yet actually the precincts of the temple were the place where people could prepare themselves to enter into the temple holier spaces all the things that were being done there were necessary.

Perhaps today it would look more like this... Picture the scene as you enter into one of our churches you are confronted first not with a welcomer with a Pew sheet and or hymnbook but by somebody selling you or offering you face coverings in order for you to be able to worship safely. Alongside them somebody else has a stall offering various different forms of hand sanitizer and hand cream to suit various different needs and yet a further stall has somebody offering you the opportunity to give electronically so that you don't have to use cash money... all of these things are a part of preparing for worship or at least things that happen in worship... So getting them done before you can enter into the church makes sense. And as you pass through them you are grateful for they are there that you can get to the place where you can offer your worship... and yet suddenly somebody enters into the church behind you they began to shout and to throw

away all of the face masks... they overturn the hand sanitizer stall they cause a small flood of hand sanitizer... they stop the electronic giving taking place and they throw out all of the people who were running these stalls. Meaning that for those people who were coming into church after you: there is now no way of entering into the place of worship because they can't be prepared properly...

You see in the second century in the precincts of the temple there were people selling animals, but they were selling the unblemished animals and doves that were needed to make sacrifices to God. And the money changes were changing money from those who had traveled into the coins need to pay the temple tax. The aim of all of these things was to allow people to feel purified in order for them to enter further into the temple yet Jesus comes in and causes absolute chaos. There is no Small wonder that the people were confused, and the Jewish officials were angry. But when Jesus explains himself, he does not direct his words at what was happening **but why** it was happening. Entering into that space Jesus could recognize that these things were taking place not to allow people to worship God but in order to collect wealth people were being cheated we ashamed. Certainly, the people were facilitating something that was just a matter of going through the motions and not a case of coming before God.

There's attractiveness in the image of the angry Jesus as I said it's often something, we could use to justify our own anger: it's righteous to be angry because Christ himself was angry. And yes, I guess in a certain way that is true but what I'm struck by when I think about this passage is that perhaps I don't live up to this standard... rather than justifying my own anger I am worried about my own lack of anger... I've certainly seen things and experienced times where going through the motions was the reality. Formality and familiarity rather than real devotion... yet I've never needed the use of a whip nor have I ever upturned a table ... and also I worry that sometimes I'm guilty of doing

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the same thing as the money changers... I don't mean exploiting people and trying to make money but I do mean going through the motions rather than engaging on a really deep level. This is something that perhaps we have all experienced were getting up and being present at church is simply a matter of being present bodily if not spiritually or mentally... perhaps easier during lockdown where you need to engage via a screen rather than in person! But the has over the past few months been moments where I've gladly engaged with church online rejoicing in the fact that I don't need to be up and dressed and out in the cold morning. That instead I can simply let church happen to me...

Yes we need anger and frustration at injustice and inequality. We need to speak out about things that are not within God's Kingdom. This passage has also made me realize that there are moments where I need to challenge myself to be more wholehearted. Jesus his actions and words in this passage act as a challenge to me to remember that we are doing something so incredibly special whenever we come to worship... that is not something to be done lightly and because it's what we always do... but to be engaged with whole heartedly. Let me be clear that the odd days where there is just too much going on for you to focus on the sermon properly does not put you into this category. Nor do the times where you might come to a service wondering if there is any point in being there... does God really exist? Because that is all a part of wholehearted faith... In my worst moments I cling to pattern of Morning Prayer because I know the words will carry me even if I'm not feeling very much like I mean them. I'm still coming before God as my complete self... That's what is desired of us.

I am wholeheartedly looking forward to being able to worship with you all in person once again. My soul yearns for the chance to share communion with a group, to open all our centres... to sing with people again... I know that this is a journey and some of these things will take longer to realise than others but I'm excited to be on that journey!

Lent is a good time to reflect and re-evaluate. If you have heard my Lent reflection you will already know that I've failed at my Lenten disciplines this year. But I'm still committed to God... I want to grow Closer to him during this time to deepen my relationship with him. Perhaps you're in a similar position, not able to keep to a set reading, or have already broken a fast... perhaps you're doing something but it's not actually making an impact on you... You may well be doing something for Lent that is benefitting you and helping you grow- I'm not tarring everyone with my brush! But this passage presents us with a reminder that 'doing' isn't the same as 'being.' The people Jesus railed against were doing the right thing, but they weren't being righteous.

The challenge I have taken from this passage, and perhaps you'd join me, is to focus on wholeheartedly loving and pursuing God. To forget the doing and the seeming but to recommit to deep relationship with God and to be fully present to Him in worship. Whether that is bright eyed and ready or whether that is tired and pjamed... I'll still bring myself, failings, feelings and worries before him completely. Wholeheartedly. Amen.