

Lent 3: THE TEMPLE

John 2:12-22 [MW18-07]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 04 March 2018

There's some real anger in that gospel reading - two quick thoughts about "anger"

- when you're angry, always count to ten before you say anything
it will give you more time to think up the right insult
- your temper is your most valuable possession, don't lose it

This morning's gospel reading gives us a very different picture of Jesus

- it is not the one most of us hold in our minds most of the time
this particular glimpse of Jesus is not usually highlighted
it's definitely not the subject of any hymns or songs of worship I am aware of
- it is also most definitely not: 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'
so what about this Jesus, the one John shows us
in only chapter 2 of his 21 chapter gospel, and right after that wedding miracle
- what is it about this Jesus???

I invite you to try if you can to picture this Jesus

- Jesus, stripped down to the waist
Jesus, with a harsh, hard, steely countenance
Jesus shouting, thundering with vehemence, and yes, anger
- Jesus flailing a thick rope like a whip
Jesus' arms going this way and that
people and animals running before him
- Jesus picking up tables, chairs, cages, containers, coin receptacles
and sending them flying
- people getting out of his way
staring aghast, in shock and disbelief
- this Jesus
this Jesus is one we are not used to seeing

And we see it because of the Temple

- for the Temple is much, much more than just a building
it is, Jesus says, "My Father's house"

Imagine if we came in one Sunday morning

- and raffle tickets were being sold in the porch/foyer there
over here was a stall playing CDs of religious music
and offering them for sale
- just over there is another stall selling books on how to pray
how to read the Bible, how to worship properly
- and yet another stall playing a DVD movie
with all sorts of spiritual movies and DVDs for sale ...
- and it is very definitely not Anglican
not being done 'decently and in order'
- there is a cacophony of discordant noise
people coming and going, milling around
stall holders shouting about their wares, and the bargains they are offering
- you get the idea ...
it would not seem like a place of worship

Jesus takes offence because what is going on in the Temple

- is not appropriate for “my Father's house”
- it has no place there: it must be overturned and driven out!

So Jesus takes this drastic action

- making a whip from thick cords, cracking it across the tables
- overturning them, send everything scattering
- shouting: “stop making my Father's house a marketplace”

Now, make no mistake those money-changers were there for a legitimate purpose

- people had to pay the Temple tax for the sacrifices
- because they were from all over and had to use Roman coins
- with Caesar's image on it – Caesar being considered divine
- the coins had to be converted to the imageless Temple money
- these coins could then be used in the Temple
- and that's absolutely fine

It was the gouging, over the top, exorbitant exchange rates

- the fleecing of the pilgrims
- that really got Jesus' goat and made him see red
- this was the Temple, the holy of holies, the centre of Jewish life and worship
- and the Temple precincts had become a veritable mall of ATMs
- a circus of noise and transactions

As one writer puts it: “holiness had been replaced by hokum”

- and Jesus reacted to all this in the way the prophets of old had done

Some seven centuries earlier the prophet Isaiah declared God's scorn for such behaviour
What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats ... bringing offerings is futile; incense is an abomination to me ... it is mercy, not sacrifice I desire. (Isaiah 1:11f)

Sometimes it seems we consider “anger” as a bad thing

- and perhaps because of this
- the image of the “angry Jesus” does not sit well with us
- however it is prophetic anger that Jesus is showing here
- outrage at what should not be, but was
- God's honour and God's people should not be treated like that
- “My Father's house is not a marketplace”

Anger of itself is not the bad thing

- it is what we do with this anger
- how we act because of it
- that makes all the difference
- this incident tells us something about Jesus and something about ourselves
- you see, people can be measured by what angers them
- yes indeed, anger can be dangerous
- so can food, sun and water
- and no one is suggesting we should have nothing to do with them
- on the other hand, anger that leads to reform, betterment, change for the good
- is a respectable and desirable emotion

Lent is the appropriate church season to look at the “seamier side of life”

- and anger is certainly part of that
so we could well reflect on the assertion that
we are judged by what angers us, and what does not
- what was going on in the Temple angered Jesus
and he acted in a particular way because of it
- what about us? what about us?

We might get angry if we get stuck in traffic

- or held up by some last minute nuisance phone-call
and are late for dinner, the movies, our favourite TV show
- are we angry because children right here are going to school without lunch?
are we angry about the abduction of innocent school girls in Nigeria?
the thousands of displaced people in the middle east?
- are we angry about the public officials who abuse their position
company directors who line their own pockets
- what about the growing number of homeless people in our fair land
those who have substandard housing
the widening chasm between the very rich and very poor ... ???

And if such things do make us angry ...

- what are we doing about it, because of it
have we, like Jesus, been moved to some action???

Now please do not misinterpret me

- I am not suggesting we get out there and tread on some toes
and overturn some tables
- though there could well be a place for that

However it seems to me this season of Lent is, to use the metaphor of today's gospel

- the church's official time to get angry enough to overturn some old tables
and set up new ones
- I came across this as I was doing my preparation
and it struck a chord with me
here are five “new tables” to set up, as outlined by William J. Bausch
[I was going to do a Power Point slide or a handout, but then I thought
let's try to commit this to memory right here and now]

Five new tables

First: I will love things that are worth loving

- some things are not worth loving like the latest gadgets or celebrities
while the things definitely worth loving are
family, faith, God, Jesus, friends ... to name a few

Second: I will put first things first

- Jesus said: “Seek first the kingdom of God & everything else will be added to you”
it's about getting our priorities straight
- worship and prayer come before picnics, hobbies or sport
caring for children, our family, our ... comes before any self-regarding pursuits

Third: I will cultivate spiritual insight

- seeing beyond the flesh and blood realities we can see
seeing our fellow human beings as they really are
as children of God – and treating them accordingly

Fourth: I will strive for integrity of character

- I will not do anything that will compromise my integrity
I will be straight up and honest in filling out forms, claiming expenses
sitting exams
- I won't do anything just to get ahead
or gain the whole world at the expense of my soul

Fifth: I will join or support causes that benefit the community

- I will support Anglican Missions, CWS, Habitat for Humanity, City Mission
I might make time to join some community group
Meals on Wheels, Linking Hands ...
- whatever it takes to lift oneself out of oneself for the sake of
turning the Temple back into “my Father's house”

During World War II, King Christian of Denmark stubbornly resisted the Nazis. His country was quite small compared to powerful Germany, and the king knew he could not win on the battlefield, but he put up a valiant moral struggle. One day he observed the Nazi flag flying above one of his public buildings. He reminded the German commander that this was contrary to the treaty between the two nations, and said, “The flag must be moved before twelve o'clock, otherwise I will send a soldier to remove it.” At five minutes before noon, the flag was still flying, and the king announced he was sending a soldier to take it down. “The soldier will be shot,” the Nazi officer said. Then King Christian calmly said, “I think I should tell you that I will be that soldier.”

Just to recap, here are five new tables to replace the old

- things that “Lenten anger” might strive for

1: I will love things worth loving

2: I will put first things first

3: I will cultivate spiritual insight

4: I will strive for integrity of character

5: I will support causes that benefit the community

This will enable the temple of our lives to be turned into “my Father's house”