

Sunday 3rd March 2024

The Third Sunday of Lent



Today's Gospel reading: John 2: 13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

This week, we hear a really dramatic story!

The Temple in Jerusalem, at the time of Jesus, was a very important place - a focal point for people's faith. Jesus would also have wanted it to be a place where everyone knew they would be loved and accepted and treated fairly.

The Temple was not like a quiet cathedral or church, as parts of it were loud and bustling. The sale of animals was essential for the Temple's function as a place for the offering of sacrifices, which were part of religious observance. What angered Jesus was how and where the merchants did this.

Parts of the Temple in which people wanted to pray and worship were like a market place and the merchants were cheating the people that Jesus loved. Many people lived too far away to bring their own animals, or they were told on arrival at the Temple that their animals weren't "perfect" enough for sacrifice and were made to pay rip-off prices they couldn't afford for suitable animals.

Visitors also needed to change money into the Temple currency, the Tyrian shekel, to pay the Temple Tax. The religious leaders said that, because the Roman coins had a picture of Caesar on them, and Caesar claimed to be a god, people couldn't use these and had to buy special "temple coins" to put in the offering. They charged people an extortionate exchange rate, so that they themselves could become rich.

This cheating is what would have bothered Jesus - the fact that traders made money out of the ordinary people who had come to worship God. It was as if they were trying to get rich off God's Temple. Jesus did not want these people "selling God" - so he did something about it!

So what does this event in the life of Jesus teach us?

Just as we feel angry when someone we love is hurt by others, Jesus felt for the people who wanted to worship God, but were being taken advantage of, right there in his Father's house. As Christians, who try to follow Jesus, we know that love is gentle and kind, but experience tells us that love can also be angry when things are unjust.

As disciples of Jesus, we are called to protect those who are vulnerable or in need, and to stand up to those who take advantage of them.

We pray today that God will give us the strength and courage to show love and justice in the world and to ensure that our churches and communities are not only places of prayer, but places where everyone knows they are loved and accepted and treated fairly.



A prayer for this week:

Heavenly Father, help us to love others and to put that love into action by looking out for those who need our help and support. Teach us to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with Christ. Amen.

Jesus cleanses the Temple

Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem. When he saw people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and people trading with money-changers—right there in the Temple—he was upset. “Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!” he cried out! In these drawings of Jesus cleansing the Temple, can you find 10 things that are different?



ANSWERS:
 1. The chicken has changed position. 2. The money bag is bigger. 3. There is one more sheep.
 4. The praying people are distracted by the noise. 5. The cage seller has lost his big beard.
 6. One of the cages has been moved. 7. The woman singing praises in the back has stripes on her robe.
 8. The scroll is now much longer. 9. Jesus has black hair. 10. The doves are escaping.

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- JERUSALEM
- PASSEOVER
- PIGEONS
- WHIP
- MARKET
- SANCTUARY
- ZEAL
- BODY
- COINS
- SHEEP
- MONEY
- HOUSE



