

## Sermon 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Lent yr.B 2024

Exodus 20.1-17, 1 Cor.1.22-25, John 2.13.13-25

There's been quite a bit in the news recently about raves in the nave. Not here, unless I've been missing something but in some of our Cathedrals. Tickets for the silent discos, including Canterbury cathedral have sold well and those attending with their personal headsets for the music and access to temporary bars for chat and cheer have enjoyed them though they have caused embarrassment to the church's leadership (or those who have a sense of shame) and have raised tiny amounts of money. Whether many ravers have returned to hear today's gospel is doubtful.

Our Gospel of today *the cleansing of the Temple* is a really important event – it appears in all four Gospels. Today's is taken from John rather than Mark in this year of Mark and we should note why the Church steps outside Mark to use John for this occasion.

It is more than mere misuse and profaning the temple it's about exploitation of people and power. Power and authority has been a theme in the early verses of Mark but the authority of Jesus is nowhere more pronounced than in the Gospel of John and its focus on the end of Christ's life and his dealings with earthly powers. Ultimately this episode in Jesus life is about who we worship and is worthy of such worship – hence the recitation of the Ten Commandments in Exodus with its emphasis on the first -only to worship God. A theme we explored last week.

The character of Jesus in our Gospel today is not meek and mild but full of righteous anger – not for his sake but for the sake of others and especially God which for Christ the Word made flesh is not divorced from love of neighbour but shown by it. It is a theme that is constantly repeated in the Gospel of John and in his letters. True love can promote anger for righteousness for those we love.

The people knew they were being ripped off – but no-one did anything. The right Jewish coinage was required to pay for the right goods for the right sacrifice and all was controlled by the temple authorities who determined what was right – not God. This is about human power and judgement in the name of God – nothing angers Jesus more.

We all know that in our own day we are ripped off all the time and often feel powerless to do anything from the smallish things of life like standing charges for power to the price of petrol and the way it follows the price of crude quickly on the way up but slowly on the way down. Some of us have noted before that the great profits and benefits of modernity such as high tech create vast private profits but the costs are borne by the public from bailing out banks to climate change and paying for the pandemic – even though certain sectors and people prospered greatly from all these things. Some of the biggest firms like Apple , Amazon etc have effective tax rates of 10% and much less – rates most of us could only dream of. No doubt they will continue to move their profits around the world pay lip service to fair rewards for lowly staff and continue to dress up their images with vomit inducing green and diversity credentials for the sake of good PR. Why is this relevant? Because pretending to be virtuous whilst exploiting the people is something they have in common with the temple authorities of Jesus's time. We can feel as if we are trapped with no alternative – no wonder our Lord was angry.

Freedom and choice are at the heart of the Exodus (the setting for the ten commandments) and true allegiance to God is about the right use of freedom and right choices. The Spirit that drove Jesus into the wilderness to confront choices in his ministry, now he drives out what is against the Spirit from the temple. His whole mission is to restore our freedom and helps us in the words of the Torah – choose life not death. The Glory of Israel is not Israel it is God. Choosing to serve or worship anything else has no ultimate meaning and is slavery and death.

What gives meaning to the readers of John is that Christ's body now fulfils the function of the temple – the oneness of God and freedom in his service is found in Christ. Note that Jesus does not say I will destroy the temple, though he will be falsely accused of that – he says destroy **this** temple, his body and it will be raised. His hearers will of course destroy both his body and the physical temple by their own actions and interaction with earthly powers in the guise of Rome – the first will be raised the second will never be rebuilt. The body of Christ that are the first hearers of John are witnesses to both.

All of our scriptures are to be read backwards into and out of the light of the resurrection. Note here how John tells us that the disciples remembered

what Jesus had said after he had risen from the dead and believed. They would never again choose the death of false gods even at the cost of their earthly lives.

After his death and resurrection they will remember and believe. They will now be living as the body where there is no division between Jew and Greek rich and poor – for this is the mark of the early church the body of Christ. John as with Mark writes this at the outset of his gospel but from the perspective of the end. Early on in his gospel John the Baptist has greeted Christ with the same words we use each time we are invited to receive communion: “Behold the Lamb of God.” No animal sacrifice is needed – here we remember the one sufficient perfect sacrifice satisfaction and oblation for all people in all times in all places. God is not contained and approached in the temple – but in Spirit.

In Christ nothing and nobody is cast aside, wasted or unworthy. Prior to this display of righteous anger in the temple that passes such judgement Jesus has taken the purification water that would have been tossed away and turned it into the finest wine at Cana. Such power, authority and love of the unloved fires not just righteous anger but courage and passion in the saints. They preach and live the crucified Christ, they are fed by his body and blood, they are brought out of slavery and set free again. It is a freedom and peace the world cannot offer or take away. May we too know, live and preach such freedom and peace for we gather in this nave not to rave but be saved. Amen.

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