

03.08.24 Exodus 20:1-17 John 1:13 – 22 “ he was speaking of the temple of his body”

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On holiday some years ago, the beach became not just a place of relaxation but one of trading. Being one who loves to shop, I didn't mind it. There was a line drawn in the sand where which the traders couldn't cross but it didn't stop them shouting for attention and it would have been ruse to ignore them.

It seemed that nothing was too large or small for them to supply. I was made a sarong and matching bolero for a visit to a temple miraculously overnight and between us I think me and my friends bought most of the carved wooden elephants in Sri Lanka. Guess what everyone got for presents!

I suppose we were fortunate that we could choose to cross the line. It doesn't always work like this and I have heard many people say that a special visit has been marred by being hounded by persistent hawkers trying to sell souvenirs. Going for one thing and having to run the gauntlet of buying and selling to get often spoils something that should be very special.

Jesus in the temple I wonder if Jesus felt like that going to the temple that day. The temple was a familiar place for him, we know that he had been there before. But this visit provoked an angry outburst from him. Imagine the scene. The temple courts – the out skirts of the temple – filled with traders selling ready to buy sacrifices in the temple, cattle, sheep, doves. Then the tables of money changers waiting to exchange the pilgrim's money into special temple coinage to pay the Temple tax. All the traders were there to provide the necessary services, but it seemed like the original good intention to help had got lost in the pursuit of gain and the house of prayer had become a busy, bustling market place. A place of business.

Enter Jesus, who looks at it all and lashes out, driving out all the traders, it is a scene of chaos and utter disbelief that later the disciples look back on and reflect on the prophecy from Psalm 69 *“Zeal for your house will consume me.”* Jesus is zealous for God to the point of righteous anger. This is no “gentle Jesus meek and mild”.

True Worship. Here right at the beginning of his ministry John has Jesus setting the scene of his ministry, purifying the temple from sin, and there's more. Jesus suggests that true worship will no longer be dependent on the temple – a very radical idea. As we could predict the Jews misunderstand when he says the temple will be destroyed and rebuilt in three days. They think only of the physical building – Jesus is referring to himself. He claims nothing less than reconstituting of the entire worship of God's people around himself.

Today we are used to that : we know that we are the body of Christ , we know that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, the place where God lives , both individually and corporately. But at the time the very suggestion would have been radical and potentially blasphemous.

So I don't think Jesus getting angry is the real point of this story. Jesus got angry. I get angry. It's ok to get angry. There's more to this story than that. And I don't think it's about the animals or the moneychangers being in the temple. Jesus surely had to have known they were there. He grew up as a faithful Jew going to the temple. He didn't turn up that day and say, “Wow! There are animals and moneychangers here. I didn't know this. This is wrong.” The animals and moneychangers had always been there. That's how the system worked. It was business as usual for them to be there. I think Jesus went to the temple that day for one purpose; to throw out and overturn business as usual. There are times when we need the tables of our life overturned, and the animals thrown out. It's just so easy to fall into the trap of business as usual.

There are thousands of reasons and ways in which we fall into business as usual. There's one thing, however, that I keep coming back to. Forgetfulness. Business as usual is born of forgetfulness. We forget

that we really are the temple of God's presence. We forget that all of creation is the residence of God. We forget that in whatever direction we might turn, there is the face of God gazing upon us. And as soon as we forget those things about ourselves, each other, or the world, life becomes business as usual. It happens anywhere: in friendships, marriages, parenting, work, church.

When we forget that we are the temple of God life can easily become a series of transactions. Relationships and intimacy are lost. Priorities get rearranged. Making a living replaces living a life. Life becomes a marketplace rather than a place for meeting the holy in ourselves and one another. And it's business as usual.

So as the temples of God, I wonder what Jesus would find if he suddenly came to his temple today. Would he find inner temples of holiness and awe where God is honoured and worshipped? What's at the very core of our being? And what about the outer courts, the interface with the world? What is going on out there for us? What would Jesus find there? Are we God's house or a marketplace where it is business as normal? What are the things that Jesus would want to drive out of our lives?

Holy Living – we're almost ten Commandments out today! we have said them and heard them read. I make no apologies, because here in Exodus God's blueprint for holy living is laid out. The ten commandments were given to the Israelites as they emerged from the oppression of the Egyptians. Given so that a new society would find a way to order itself. Given as a strategy for an enduring relationship between God and his people.

God's freedom and wellbeing for all that starts with the need for total loyalty to God – *"You shall have no other gods before me."* We find our joy, destiny, and fulfilment in God alone, not in things or commodities. God is to be honoured, to be first in our hearts, taught to our children, worshipped and loved. That's what should be going on in the inner courts of our temple: in our hearts and soul. There is no place for business as usual. In the outer courts are the terms for living alongside others. Some are obvious *"You shall not murder. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour."* Others more subtle. We are not to long for things which are not ours. We are to be content with what we have. We are to honour our family members and take sufficient rest to be able to enjoy creation and break the cycle of production.

The ten commandments give a framework for an ordered life in God's society, and Jesus adds the new commandment of love for one another: going the extra mile, turning the other cheek, loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us. These are the ways of living Jesus would expect to find in God's temple— in each of us as individuals and in his church, the body of Christ.

Over and over again Jesus is interrupting, disrupting, overturning, and throwing out business as usual. Business as usual is destructive of our lives and relationships. It destroys our ability to see and participate in the holy that is already present in and among us. Regardless of who we are, what we've done or left undone, or how we see or judge our life, we are the temple of God and there is one who stands in the temple of our life interrupting business as usual. So, what does the temple of our life need today? What tables in our life need to be overturned? What animals need to be driven out?

Jesus comes today to his temple - to each of us. He comes to purify, heal nurture and love. Let's allow him to enter our inner and outer courts, inviting him to make the necessary changes for us to become the place where God is honoured and worshiped.

He was speaking of the temple of our body.