

Bennochy church: 4th March 2018

He was angry. Boy was he angry. Change that. He was furious. *'How dare you. How dare you act in such a way as this. In this building of all places. Do you not know where you are?'* It must have been quite a sight. This man of God, who was building up a bit of a reputation for himself, venting his anger, in such a visible way, in the temple precinct.

What was going was this. If you wanted to make a sacrifice at the temple, and that was part and parcel of how you worshipped God as a Jew, you would need an animal to offer your sacrifice to God. Sacrifice is a messy business. I am not sure we would like it! To buy your animal, you needed to use certain coinage. So you would make your way to the money changers, the 'bureau de change', who for their own profit and maybe also the temple authorities, would change your money, for a handsome profit. Even if you brought your own animal, it needed to be checked to make sure it was pure enough. It never was. So you would have to buy one of theirs. Another handsome profit is made.

My good chaps, I wonder if you would mind awfully, stop doing this? Crack! A homemade whip drives out the animals. It must have been a scene to behold. Bang! Tables are overturned. The noise of coins clattering as they fell off the tables. A voice shouts, *"Get rid of those pigeons!"*

People look in horror and amazement at the man who is in a rage. Others are angry, but with him. *'What is he up to. Does he not know who we are and what he has done?'* And what of the religious leaders. What is their response to this devastation? Well all they seem to be able to muster, is a question! I don't know about you, but that seems the response of wimps. *'I know what we will do, let's not arrest him, or throw him out or exert our authority. Let's ask a question!'* Is that the best they could manage?

It seems to me that there is a disconnect between the two halves of this story. The demand for a miracle really does not fit with what has gone before. It is almost as if John sets up the question, to take us to what is most important. The story's dramatic. It shows us another side of Jesus. But the question is the 'bridge' to where John is taking us in this story. John is wanting to make a theological point. The story starts in the Jerusalem temple, and ends with Jesus words about him being the temple. The question may never have been asked. That does not matter. The point is the words of Jesus, in response to it.

Remember, this all happens before any one has even considered the death of Jesus and inevitably leads to cross wires. They must have looked at Jesus in bewilderment. *'It took 46 years to build this place, and you are telling us it is possible to rebuild it in three days'*. We have got connection. We know how

the story ends. That is the point. So does John. So does his readers. For them and us this miracle has already taken place.

Having said that, John feels the need to put in an explanation and this brings the story back into the present tense. Once resurrection has happened, the disciples will then be able to look back on these words of Jesus and remember them, and know, that scripture is true.

I think the dramatic nature of the story almost overshadows the point John is trying to make here. It is easier to remember the noise of the whip. Of overturning tables, animals fleeing and people shouting. We retain such mental images of sound and sight. We latch onto the dramatic, like miracles. Yet, what was to come, would be even more dramatic. Changing history itself. There are not that many moments, where the path of history actually changes. Easter is one such moment.

John is taking us on a journey. He says, walk with me though the temple courts and witness the drama of the cleansing of the temple. Hear the question put to Jesus and maybe the distain in their voices, and then, gather around Jesus, and listen of the miracle still to come.

I think we can relate to the anger of Jesus. Because we have felt it deep within ourselves. Things that have happened and are happening in our world that we know are wrong. We want to

speak out. We want to act. We want to respond. Yet, often we feel powerless to do so.

If ever there was a story that showed Jesus as he truly was, this is it. His anger, his reaction, taps into the humanity of Jesus. Son of Mary and Joseph. The miracle to come, speaks of his divinity. Son of God and Son of Man. To end the story with the temple cleansed, would be a story incomplete. To record only his words, would miss the point, that here is a man like us. This is 'incarnation'. God who pitches his tent in the midst of humanity. This is 'Immanuel', *God with us*.

Anger became compassion, as a man laid down his life for others, and without anger, there can be no justice. There is something in this story about tapping into who we are, and in our walk with God, we seek to 'cleanse' what we see, and name to be wrong in the world. Cracking a whip for peace. Overturning tables of injustice. All in God's name, because this is his world, carved out of his love and his compassion. Amen.