**worshipping together while we are apart**

**Morning Prayer for Wednesday 10th March 2020**

**Readings**: Psalm 19, John 2.13-22

# Reflection

We usually think of this episode in the temple as coming near the end of Jesus' life, after he has ridden into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. It's the confrontation that gives the authorities the evidence they need that Jesus of Nazareth is a troublemaker, probably trying to overthrow the government. The story of the cleansing of the temple does come near the end in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Jesus' outburst in the temple was one of the last straws that led to his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. However, in John's Gospel, the story comes in chapter 2, very near the beginning. I wonder why? Did Jesus chase the moneychangers more than once? Was it a regular occurrence? It's more likely that all four Gospel writers knew the same story, but John saw it as having a particular meaning. He didn’t see this event as a political catalyst leading to Jesus' arrest. For John, Jesus' actions in the temple pointed to the heart of who Jesus was and what he had come to do. It had to come at the beginning, not at the end. Jesus' disruption in the temple that day was a powerful sign of Jesus' disruption of the way things were, of the way he would turn the tables and challenge the social norms again and again.

At the heart of the Jewish culture of the time was an elaborate system of purification. Some things were considered pure and others impure. Women were impure seven days after the birth of a son, 14 days after the birth of a daughter. Dead bodies were impure. People with blemishes such as leprosy were impure. Certain foods were impure, the list was very long. This purification system had implications that created a culture of social boundaries between pure and impure, whole and not whole, male and female, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile.

The temple was at the centre of this purification system. The animals were being sold because they were required for sacrifice. Moneychangers were an essential part of the system. You couldn’t buy your sacrifice with Roman coins stamped with the emperor's image so moneychangers weren't changing money for money, they were giving pure tokens in exchange for impure money.

Jesus wasn’t the first Jew to cry out against abusing the temple. Centuries before Jesus, the prophet Micah asked,

“Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
    with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
    the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
He has shown you, O mortal, what is good.  
    And what does the Lord require of you?  
To act justly and to love mercy  
    and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6.7-8)

Jesus challenged the purification system in almost everything he did, he longed to draw people back to the first commandment: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.” (Exodus 20.2-3). This commandment is based on relationship, the relationship between God and God's people. Remember who you are, Jesus was saying, and even more importantly, remember who you belong to. Your worth isn’t measured in pure or impure categories but in God's redeeming power, liberating you from Egypt, from exile, from whatever traps you now.

Jesus' life and ministry challenged the rules that labelled things and people pure or impure. Such categories were overturned by God's compassion. Compassion for those considered outsiders or impure is a recurring theme in John's Gospel:

Compassion for the Samaritan woman at the well. She was considered impure because of her ancestry and her behaviour.

Compassion for the woman accused of adultery threatened with stoning. She was considered impure and the written laws said so.

Compassion for sheep who are not yet part of God's fold.

Who are the outsiders or those considered impure in our communities?

In John’s version of the story of the last supper, Jesus gets down on his knees and washes his disciples' dirty feet. Once more, the tables are turned. Who’s the master? Who's the servant? Jesus doesn’t speak words about the bread and the wine but says to his disciples: "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.  By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.’" (John 13.34-35). By your love for one another everyone will know that you are my disciples, not by maintaining the boundaries, not by labelling some pure and others impure, but by the love you have for one another.

What is God saying to you through this passage this morning?

What does God want you to do about it?

**The Collect**

Eternal God,

give us insight to discern your will for us,

to give up what harms us,

and to seek the perfection we are promised

in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Prayers**

Including:

* Those who are considered outsiders or who are labelled as different, impure or unclean by society.
* Prayer for Roads in our parish – this week we are praying for Lauries Close and Sharpes Lane. Those who are mourning for loved ones who have died.
* Teachers, parents and students as they return to school routines with new systems, especially around testing.
* NHS workers, care workers and other key workers.
* People who are lonely or frightened.
* Those who are struggling financially or fear losing their jobs.
* Those delivering the vaccine for Covid-19.
* For the work of DENS in feeding the hungry and helping the homeless.
* Leaders of the nations of the world, for wisdom in their decision making.
* Leaders of all churches, including Archbishop Justin and our Bishops: Alan, Michael and Richard.
* For our Churchwardens, Elders and PCC.