

3RD SUNDAY IN LENT

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Photograph by Carolyn Wheeler

READ: JOHN 2:13-22

"Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple..."

REFLECT:

This morning I summarized the lectionary options for this week to Carolyn, partly to help me choose and partly because I look to her, and her amazing archive of photos, for a picture to put alongside the text. When I told her that the gospel story was Jesus overturning tables in the temple courtyard, her eyes lit up. "Ooh, choose that one! I love it when Jesus gets angry. It means that we're supposed to get angry about injustice as well."

It speaks volumes about our respective personalities that my reaction to this text is the polar opposite. I'm so conflict-averse that if I'm with someone who makes a complaint, or sends their food back in a restaurant, I just want the ground to open up and swallow me whole!

If I'd been a disciple there with Jesus when he started thrashing about with an improvised whip, shouting, pushing tables over, making a scene, every fibre of my being would have been screaming at me to get out of there.

Read the passage again, this time picturing yourself in the midst of the story. Where would you have been? What emotions do the events evoke in you? Discomfort? Exhilaration? Triumph? Confusion? Fear?

Now notice the places where this story seems to touch our own place and time. The lead up to the Passover festival was a preparation time. People were coming to the temple to make sacrifices in order to purify themselves in readiness. There are similarities with Lent: a period of preparation and repentance as we approach Holy week.

The rich image the Gospel writer paints of the temple courtyard; crowded, noisy, ringing with voices selling and bartering, and the frightened cries of animals in pens and cages, for me conjures news footage of the wet markets that may have been a source of our current pandemic.

And the language of "driving out" reminds us of the Holy Spirit driving Jesus out into the wilderness, and perhaps of the way we have been - in a sense - driven out of our own places of worship during recent times. Helpfully Jesus' words remind us that his body, not the building, is the true sanctuary of God's presence.

CONNECT:

A few questions for us to reflect and pray on:

- If this pandemic is due to our exploitation and commodification of the the earth and its creatures, how are we called to live differently, as individuals and communities?
- Having been 'driven' out of our church buildings, we have an opportunity to reflect on how we are using them. What are they for? Who are they for?
- How do we handle conflict? What should we be angry about?

PRAY:

- For the Holy Spirit's guidance as we begin to plan for a return to our church buildings
- That we will use this preparation time to review our priorities and listen for God's call
- For the courage not to run from conflict
- For all who are suffering or struggling due to the far-reaching effects of Covid-19

RESOURCES:

Our friends at Wheatley URC have a huge archive of online sermons you can listen to, and are regularly posting new resources on their website:
www.wheatleyurc.org.uk

SUPPORT:

Pauline and myself, and your elders, are here for you if you need someone to talk to, have a prayer request, or just fancy a chat! Ping us an email or give us a ring.