

Sermon on Sunday 3 March 2024

by Melanie Seward, Lay Reader

Readings: 1 Corinthians 1: 18-25 & John 2. 13-22



'Putting your heart where your mouth is.'

'Good morning, everyone!'

Of course, this morning is not the same for us all. We might come to this service full of energy and stimulated to pick up some ideas to mull over, some lyric or musical phrase to sing through the day. You might be very sleepy, dare I mention a hangover or, feeling very achy and generally 'unwell' or 'out of sorts.' Perhaps, you have been dragged along by someone else or, grumpily 'made' yourself come today. Sometimes I sit and find myself thinking about something I must do or a conversation I am going to have later so, I'm fully aware that you might not have been hanging on to every word of the Gospel.

You now have the option of re-reading the passage from John chapter 2, verses 13 to 22, or you can choose simply to sit and recall the episode of Jesus cleansing the Temple (turning over the tables).

What detail or thought struck you today? If you have a few minutes and someone else is around, you might like to share your ideas.

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The action takes place in Jerusalem. At certain key times in the year and in life, Jews were required by their religious law to attend the Temple and provide an animal or, for those with little money, pigeons or doves. The priest would then bless the offering and make a sacrifice to God whose presence was believed to dwell in the Holy of Holies, the inner walled space of the Temple precinct.

The Temple was the centre of the Jewish religion and nation. It was the most sacred of places. In the outer court of the huge building, livestock were purchased with special Temple money - the rate of exchange for money and the price of goods benefitting the traders greatly. On Temple property, ordinary people were being stitched up by the organisation of their own faith. Moreover, it's the important festival of

Passover and the place would have been teeming with people - the takings would be sizable.

Jesus says in verse 16: 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

Authority had combined with greed to make the Temple a business rather than being a place where people were invited to come into the dwelling place of the presence of God. It was over two thousand years ago; it can seem a different age and yet we can be sorely tempted ourselves to give buying and selling a greater priority in our lives than God. Money is at the centre of modern western life - it takes a conscious effort to place God at the centre.

Jesus acts in a very 'loud' way - his gestures are grand - unmissable - disrupting all conversation and action (upturning the furniture and chasing with a whip!). Jesus is putting himself out there - making a very obvious stand. It's about personal spirituality, He's negatively passing judgement on the traders. It's controversial and certainly will cause a religious and a political stir. It is a disturbance of the peace and a challenge to the leadership.

As a bystander, whether you think that Jesus acts out of righteous anger or instead acts out a symbolic statement of belief and intent, do you (and do I) feel uncomfortable or would we be rooting for Jesus? How would we respond to the mutterings of discontent? And, in our current lives, are we

ready to voice our concerns or challenge when we believe things are unjust or unholy?

Again, we can note that in John's Gospel, the scene in the Temple is placed immediately after Jesus turning the water into wine at 'The Wedding in Cana', where Mary expresses faith in Jesus and tells others to follow his instructions. She says, 'Do whatever he tells you'.

In contrast, at the Temple, Jesus is asked for a sign from God to prove his authority from God. How come that he can do what amounts for some to be irreligious and disrespectful of Jewish beliefs and traditions handed through the generations? Jesus answers them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up'. They mock the idea, assuming he is speaking of the physical, stone-built Temple. They will not believe in any signs – not even when the Temple of Jesus's body triumphs over the grave.

Think for a few seconds.... Do we demand physical proof of God or expect God to give us blatant signs in our lives that will somehow reduce the need for faith? Do we miss or misread our lives by not waiting and listening for God?

Maybe, you are familiar with the phrase 'to put your heart where your mouth is'. It's a bit like the saying 'put your money where your mouth is'. Both are about making words a reality. The best definition I could find was this: Putting your heart where your mouth is should mean something like 'you

profess to value certain people, groups, projects, issues etc – now let that become your true inner person, your heart'. Jesus shows his heart is one with God and therefore is impelled to speak out.

*Let the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.*

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