

**Reflection on Sunday 4 August 2024 at 8am service by Adrian Walter, Lay Leader of  
Worship Reading:**

**The Cleansing of the Temple – Luke 19 41-48**

What happened when Jesus rode into town?

Well, according to Luke, a series of things took place.

First, He wept over the ignorance and prejudice that prevented people from seeing what peace truly meant. His tears were tears of insight. He was not deceived by the marble and gold of Jerusalem, but He saw a spiritual poverty and ignorance of things that really matter. He saw beneath the peaceful view of the Holy City, that there was no true peace in the city of peace

Second, He went to the most sacred religious institution and cleansed it of those who were using religion to make a profit for themselves. He drove out those who traded in doves and temple money who sought to make the experience of God something which had to be paid for. He created a clear space where there were barriers before.

Third, He justifies his actions by quoting from the Scriptures. First from Isaiah where the full text is: *'my house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples'*. (Luke only records the first part) effectively, God cannot only be accessed by one nation, and second from Jeremiah, *"but you have made it a den of robbers"* In other words, God cannot be traded, brokered, or controlled in any way.

You see, God can be experienced by anyone, anywhere, anytime, in a thousand different ways. Jesus challenges the prevailing religious climate of the time which controlled access to God through hierarchy, money, cultural limitation and prejudice.

*This* account ends with the town authorities rising up and retaliating by planning to kill Christ. But we know how *the* whole story ends.

So, moving on 2000 years, what would happen if Jesus rode into *our* town?

As He approached the town from the south looking down on it from the top of Peggs Lane, would he stand and weep at what he saw? Would he see people pursuing all manner of things in their search for peace, drink, drugs, beauty, shopping, housing, careers, power...? Would He see them blind to the needs of their fellow citizens

As He walked down into the town and made His way into the churches, would He be filled with rage at what he found there? Would He find our churches a place of prayer where people are welcoming, accepting, understanding, loving, or would He instead see a den of robbers, oh, not in the financial sense but people who put up barriers based on prejudice, intolerance, pride. Would He be able to tell the difference between those He met in the market and those He met in the churches?

In Matthew's account of Jesus in the temple he records Him as saying *"Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the door of the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to."* Could He say that of us?

I grew up in a family who had come to know Christ after attending a Billy Graham convention. It's a long and wonderful story of God's leading and provision but they started a church from scratch (with the help of other ministers and the Bishop of Leicester). They looked to the Bible

for advice about how things should be done and the result was a large Independent Free Church which is still thriving to this day. The church was built on verses found in scripture, but I mention this because, during the 59 years since I made the decision to follow Christ I have had to reassess my beliefs on many occasions and accept that, while everything I was taught was Biblically sound, it has to be interpreted through the lens of 20th century society. I could so easily have remained a dogmatic fundamentalist believer who shut the door to the kingdom in some people's faces. As it is, in the words of Micha, I have had to allow God to, "...*show you, Adrian, 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.*"

Returning to the Gospel reading, as I said, *that* account ended with the town authorities rising up and retaliating by planning to kill Christ. But we know how *the whole story* ends.

What we don't know is how *our* story ends. Will we cling onto our pursuit of peace by chasing after all the transient things that world holds dear, defending our traditions and beliefs at all costs even to the point where we make our churches unattractive or, worse still, hostile to those who are different to us. Would our MP, Town, District or County Councillors rise up and plan to silence our Lord if He challenged our priorities as a Nation, County, District, Town or even a Parish?

Or will we, as followers of Jesus, do everything in our power to make this place, His Father's place, a house of prayer, for all nations, a place where everyone, regardless of race, background, lifestyle, social standing are welcomed, accepted, protected and loved?

May God give us the grace and strength to keep *our* church as a beacon of light and hope in this ever-darkening world in which we live.

Amen