

From the Rector's Study, the Rev. Bryce Sangster
Sunday, March 3rd, 2024, Lent III
Exodus 20:1-17, Psalm 19, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22

Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple. Why did he do that? The money changers had set up barriers for people coming to the temple. The money changer aspect is fairly obvious for us today because charging a price for or the exchange rate would be in favour of the money changers making money on the exchange. But why the sheep, cattle, and doves?

Because people would bring their own animal or bird for the sacrifice, and that was a lot cheaper than having to pay for one at the temple. But they could not use their own animal for sacrifice because it was deemed blemished, and they had to buy from the authorities at the temple.

Jesus was letting the authorities know in a dramatic way that this was greatly unfair and taking advantage of people and setting up a way to keep them out of the temple unless...

The last part, Jesus talking about the temple being destroyed and in three days being raised up. It doesn't seem to fit the rest of the passage. Unless you take into account that the authorities would have been very upset at Jesus for his actions and would have more than likely begun a plot to stop Jesus and have him killed.

In fact, Matthew, Mark, and Luke have Jesus driving the money changers out as the final act which gets Jesus crucified. John on the other hand has Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead as the final straw which gets Jesus crucified.

Regardless, what is the connection between the two parts of the passage?

Maybe it is not just about not doing stuff which take advantage of other people. Not just stop being selfish and exploitive of others but actually being positive and supportive of others.

In Corinthians Paul talks about the foolishness of the cross. The foolishness of God is wiser than our wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than our strength as well.

The expression which comes to mind is: Nice guys finish last.

And that the death of the Messiah is not what the disciples had in mind. And maybe this meant having personal power and doing stuff that was of

benefit to others but also to ourselves. The resurrection but not the death. And the wisdom of transactional relationships. Then the question where do we find value? Again, it's not just in waiting until the next life.

We find value in our relationship with others. Connection gives us meaning. Both our weaknesses and our strengths bring us into relationship with God and each other.

Without strengths we would have nothing to offer each other in relationship. Without weaknesses we would be fine being alone, individuals without any need for others.

I wonder, is this Jesus going beyond the world's wisdom of the survival of the fittest or the most successful? That we don't have to be in competition, and there is another way.

It has been said before that the rich need the poor to show them how rich they are. It is a relative term. And our sense of independence is in some sense an illusion. Money and power give a sense of independence in this world, but it is only as good as the agreement we have with each other. And we are less independent than we used to be when people grew their own food. We are dependant on others for the things we need to live. And the thought is that money gives us that freedom. But is this an everlasting situation?

A few years ago, I read a book from the sixties with a story which took place in Florida after a nuclear event isolating the one community. Gold and jewelry became a hazard as it turned people's skin black who wore it, and money became valueless, and they had to revert to the barter system. Therefore, not even the illusion of being independent because of finances.

In Matthew 5: 43-48 Jesus talks about loving your enemies. And that got me thinking, that maybe over simplistically we relate either by fear or love. That what Jesus is suggesting is taking us beyond fear to love. Understanding who we are and our strengths and weaknesses and what we need to make our hearts sing.

What do we see when we look ourselves in the mirror in the morning?

Daniel Quinn has said that our governing and rules presuppose that for the most part people are better than they actually are.

The reality is that the money changers were not breaking the rules.

This means for us living in both worlds that we are facing an element of fear, but the challenge is to move from fear and power which comes from fear to an element of love. And that love is not just a feeling of warmth but may call us to action of challenge of others who are taking advantage of those whom we are called to love, like Jesus today.

I am reminded of a story by Anthony De Mello I have told before:

A hermit was sitting alone obviously, under a tree. A thief came by brandishing a large sword. The hermit was calm and seemed unimpressed by the thief and the sword. The thief asked him what he could do to get the hermit to be impressed by the thief and his big sword.

The hermit pointed to a branch on the tree he was leaning against. And said to cut it down with the sword.

The thief with a mighty swing cut down the branch.

The thief smiled and asked if the hermit was now impressed and afraid.

The hermit returned the smile and suggested the thief replace the branch on the tree.

The thief was horrified at this request and said he could not put the branch back.

The hermit said that it is a lot easier to destroy than it is to create.

Amen

Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace;
be of good courage;
hold fast that which is good;
render to no one evil for evil;
strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak;
help the afflicted; honour everyone;
love and serve the Lord,
rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit;
and the blessing ...