



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT — MARCH 4, 2018
EXODUS 20:1-17; PSALM 19:7-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25; JOHN 2:13-22

IF YOU'RE NOT OUTRAGED, YOU'RE NOT... JESUS

JOHN 2:13-22: [The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.]

It made me mad doing research about anger for preaching today. It's full of platitudes, and obfuscations, and pitfalls, and just plain bulloney!

There are articles like, "Is it a sin to be angry?" And questions on Google like, "If Jesus got angry, was he sinning?" Then there are lists of "Six Things That Make Jesus Angry" (I kid you not), followed by "Seven Things That Make Jesus Angry." I guess that second list maker is an angrier Bible reader than the first

one. There are elaborate explanations of why Jesus can get angry but YOU can't. And there are explanations of why Jesus' anger wasn't really anger, because it was righteous.

Oh dear Lord!

Can we please agree on one thing about today's Gospel? Jesus was angry! This throwing over of the tables in the Temple is in all four Gospels. Clearly this was a remembrance in the oral tradition told

enough times, in enough ways, that all four evangelists found it important to include in their Gospels.

Something was out of balance enough that Jesus was angry.

“Take these things out of here!” is what we heard today.

When something is out of balance, we feel it in our gut, and we say NO.

NOOO.

If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention.

We Shall Overcome. Black Lives Matter. MeToo. Si se puede.

Jesus was throwing over the tables for all of it! And I'm not just making an anachronistic leap here.

When Jesus erupted in the Temple, it wasn't just about cows and sheep and the doves and the currency being there. It had been there all his life, and it ostensibly served a purpose, to help people who came as pilgrims have the sacrifices they needed to do their temple worship properly. At face value. Because Jesus was here to change what “properly” means.

Something more insidious was going on in the guise of proper worship: injustice was going on here, in this part of the temple called the court of the Gentiles. This was the place where all “the nations,” as the Gentiles have been called, could come to the Lord, a vision

that goes all the way back to Isaiah (56). In Jesus' day, in this part of the temple, foreigners and outcasts, who were deemed not pure enough to enter further into the holy places deeper in the Temple, could come somewhere close to the Lord. But now it is filled with commerce, crowding out the holy – and more, as places of commerce tend to do, cheating those who had nothing to spare, making it harder for them. THAT is the desecration of his Father's house!

Jesus walks into this scene and sees that the Temple leaders have not only allowed this to happen, but they turn a blind eye because they line their pockets with the profits and payoffs from the vendors, as well. On the backs of the poor, on the backs of the weary, on the backs of strangers, putting barriers between God's beloved children and the God who loves them. The whole system needed overturning.

And that's what Jesus preaches with his very presence, and throughout his ministry. In the synoptic Gospels, Jesus disrupts the Temple near the end of his ministry: in Matthew, it's chapter 21 (12-17); in Mark, it's chapter 11 (15-19); in Luke, chapter 19 (45-48). But in the Gospel of John that we heard today, it is early on; it is chapter 2 (13-22). And the striking note in John's Gospel is that Jesus calls the Temple “my Father's house,” making his claim early on and right aloud to being the son of God. We're used to thinking of him that way, but them's fightin' words in Jesus' day. Blasphemous. Words that are as

disruptive as angrily overthrowing the tables that had become a barrier!

And if the son of God can be angry at crassness and injustice that keeps people from living fully into their belovedness as children of God, then so can the rest of us children of God! So must we.

Jesus took on the power of the Temple and hollered NO!

Had someone told you that being submissive to patriarchy was your duty as a Christian woman?

We say NO! Turn over that moneychangers table, that hoards and lords power. NO.

Had someone told you that you are not welcome at the table of the Lord who loves you, because of whom you love?

We say NO! Turn over that moneychangers table, that limits God's family. NO.

Did someone tell you that your skin color, your homeland, your experience of God is not as good and is not welcome?

We say NO! Turn over that moneychangers table, that wants to claim priority. NO.

And who are "we?" We are the followers of Jesus Christ! We follow him into the Temple and say NO to exclusion. NO to desecration of the sacred by placing obstacles, and taking advantage, and going along with an unjust status quo.

The powers that be had a stake in the money-changing in the Temple. Just like the powers

that be in our Congress – and in our commerce – have a stake in the money that comes from the NRA, and we can't get reasonable gun reforms when our children are dying. But when individual desire to own and worship *things* becomes a more important part of our national temple than the life and flourishing of all of us as a community, we look to Jesus' example of upsetting the powers that be, loving the people who are powerless, and breaking down the idols that keep them in harm's way.

Anger seems scary in this context. But if you heard Rev. Ed Bacon here last week, remember, it is not hate that is the opposite of love; it is fear. So we need to act fearlessly and overturn tables. Like the students who are sick of having to have active-shooter drills and planning the March 24 "March for Our Lives" event here in Seattle, in solidarity with marches around the nation.

When we act on things that matter, we're following Jesus' example. Did Jesus get mad when it mattered? You bet he did! Here's the bigger question: do we?

I know this may sound a little energetic for the season of Lent, this season of introspection, of repentance. These things look quieter on the outside. But are they? If our introspection is to welcome Jesus into our hearts, but not to then bring him out into the world, we're only part-way there. If our repentance is only to say "I'm sorry" but not to change, to turn and work toward something new, we're only part-way there.

We walk the way of the cross with Jesus during this holy season, and it is a profound, reverent time. But Jesus also turned over those tables in the temple on his way to the cross.

We have these magnificent, evocative Stations of the Cross here in our Cathedral this Lent, a holy, mindful somatic prayer. But we know, the way of the cross didn't start with Station #1, Jesus is Condemned to Death. First, Jesus got mad, and he upset the powers that be, and he challenged their idols, and he loved people that they didn't want him to love, and he welcomed people they had set up barriers to. And the consequences were severe: Jesus is condemned to death.

I am not trying to do a gloss on the damage that selfish or self-righteous anger does in this world, and the people who have suffered under an angry hand. But I am calling out, as

a nice girl who was raised by this culture not to make a ruckus, that when ruckus is called for in the name of justice, Jesus led the way.

Leslie Jamison in *The New York Times*, quotes black feminist writer and activist Audre Lord: "I have suckled the wolf's lip of anger, and I have used it for illumination, laughter, protection, fire in places where there was no light, no food, no sisters, no quarter," and she says "anger isn't just a blaze, burning structures to the ground; it also casts a glow, generates heat and brings bodies into communion."¹

YES. We belong in communion! That is why Jesus gets angry! Is that anger a sin? NO. We don't repent of calling out injustice, of doing our part to turn over the tables in the temples of power. That's how we walk with Jesus to the cross, carrying not just our own, but also our neighbors' crosses – and rise all together with Jesus at the Resurrection.

¹Jamison, Leslie. "I Used to Insist I Didn't Get Angry. Not Anymore. On Female Rage." *The New York Times*, January 17, 2018. Accessed February 26, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/magazine/i-used-to-insist-i-didnt-get-angry-not-anymore.html>



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