



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR

THE THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT, YEAR B, MARCH 3, 2024

EXODUS 20:1-17; PSALM 19; 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25; JOHN 2:13-22

STORY-TELLING AS SPIRITUAL WORK



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.]*

One of the themes in the Cathedral's new Strategic Plan, recently adopted by the vestry, is "connecting and telling our stories."

There are many ways we already do that in this wonderful community, and it is exciting to see how ministry groups are taking up this

charge with new fervor and purpose. I hope you will also.

Telling our stories is a way of being known, being seen, being understood. And as a community of faith, we are invited to situate our stories in the context of a larger story, a layered story that connects us to generations before us, and those who will come after, and always, always, grounded in God's story.

This is what we are doing every time we gather for worship—bringing the stories of our lives and weaving them with the stories of scripture and God's engagement with us, while we are surrounded by the spirits of those who have gone before us in this place.

It is sacred work, this telling of our stories. It is transformative work.

Here on this Third Sunday in Lent, when we hear the story of Jesus turning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, I'd like to share a story of Saint Mark's origins. I might label it a Lenten story for its uncomfortable edge. Truth-telling is a part of our work. May it prick our ears and our hearts in ways that startle and stir us to consider our own Lenten stories here and now.

Saint Mark's was founded in 1889 by a small group of lay folks at Trinity Parish, our Mother Church. These men included senior warden Henry Burnett, his brother Hiram who was a timber baron, and vestryman Charles Prosch, who was a newspaper publisher. They had a rather bitter falling out with Trinity's rector, George Herbert Watson, and decided to form a new church,

to be named St. Mark's, after the Burnett brothers' home church in Southborough, Massachusetts (where, coincidentally, one of the four candidates for our next bishop currently serves as rector). It's a small church!

Publicly, the men aspiring to breakaway from Trinity said the second church was needed to accommodate Seattle's population growth but privately their anger with Trinity's priest was fomenting the decision. They launched a harsh public attack on Fr. Watson. They declared the new church would be a church free of pew rents, the practice of reserving the pews for those who paid for them, while the rest were left to stand in the back. Talk about moneychangers in the temple!

Fr. Watson at Trinity was understandably unsupportive but eventually agreed to the establishment of the new church to serve the north end of the city, provided its parochial boundaries were north of Pike Street. Queen Anne and Capitol Hill were largely undeveloped at the time.

St. Mark's opened in early 1889, but then Trinity's church and rectory burned in the great Seattle fire of June 1889. Fr. Watson intended to worship and sleep in a small chapel Trinity had been using for Sunday School for several years. The problem was that this chapel was at Second and Blanchard (north of Pike Street), and it had been purchased for Trinity's use a decade earlier by Hiram Burnett, who still held title.

Mr. Burnett refused Trinity's access to the chapel, even though St. Mark's had an alternative place to worship.

For ten months Bishop Paddock tried to mediate a solution to no avail. The anger roiled into lawsuits against each other. Not the most auspicious or grace-filled story of our beginnings, huh?!

Anger has its purpose in human experience, but when left unchecked by the false self, it can cause great harm. We surely all know that to be true.

Theologians speak of righteous anger—the sort that Jesus exemplifies in today's gospel—as being useful in setting healthy boundaries that translate communal lament into compassionate action and justice-seeking.¹ This is differentiated from a festering anger that seeks revenge or punishment or retaliation.

To be clear, Jesus was not subverting the Jewish religious system of sacrifice in the temple, as some Christian polemicists have argued. He was a faithful Jew and made his pilgrimages to Jerusalem to participate in the religious practices that spoke to him and fed him.

He was angered by the abuses of the merchants selling the animals and exchanging people's money for temple currency. A whole market economy had arisen within the temple, and he was furious.

The merchants and moneychangers were exploiting the people, and they had moved from the outer courtyards into the worship space so that the chaotic fervor had become central to the pilgrims' experience. He was angry at the desecration and the violation of people's worship experience.

We have a lot in our sights that might evoke righteous anger in us today—the despicable treatment of Palestinians who are on the brink of starvation, our government's complicity in that injustice; the death of Nex Benedict in Oklahoma, a 16-year-old non-binary teen who had been bullied and beaten at their school and the complicity of school leaders; the death of Alexei Navalny who spoke truth to corruption.

Faced with such outrageous tragedies, anger may be the price we must pay for paying attention. Some would say it is a sin not to be angry.

But how we use our anger, and how it uses us, is important to the work. Here are three ways to differentiate:

- Righteous anger seeks to correct injustice and restore relationships, not to harm or punish others.
- Righteous anger helps us focus on the issue at hand and avoids becoming irrational and unfocused or persistent.
- Righteous anger is patient and controlled, not impulsive or destructive.²

¹ Adapted from essays by Barbara Holmes, Richard Rohr, and Allan Dwight Callahan, cac.org

² Adapted from an [essay](#) on righteous anger. While I don't agree with everything in this article, there are some good gleanings.

St. Paul told the church in Ephesus: do not let the sun go down on your anger,³ which is to say, cultivate merciful compassion out of your lament, seek a clear path to action that is respectful, resolute, and hopefully restorative. And always remember to tend to your own wounds as you work out your anger. This is the substrate of healing for ourselves and the world.

And now the rest of the story...

For ten months Bishop Paddock strived to mediate a resolution to the conflict that shaped St. Mark's origins. Lawsuits were prepared to be filed when in spring of 1890 St. Mark's second rector, David Claiborne Garrett of Iowa surprisingly said he would accept the call on only one condition: that St. Mark's release all claims to the chapel at Second and Blanchard and worship instead in a building owned by the University of Washington.

It was there that the women of St. Mark's in those early days devoted themselves to the

work of justice: welcoming newcomers with grace and good will regardless of economic station, feeding the hungry of our fair city, raising money for charitable purposes locally and abroad, thereby ensuring that such values were sewn into our DNA as a community of faith. We have them to thank as we sit in our pews here today contemplating how we use our righteous anger for good in our time.

Glory to God whose power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory to God from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20)



SAINT MARK'S
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!
