

# ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως: Lent 3-B (7 March 2021)

St. Thomas', Glassboro

The Rev. Todd Foster

*Time-stamp: <2021-03-06 Sat 17:11>*

## **Collect**

Almighty God, you know that we have no power in ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

*Exodus 20:1-17, 1 Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22, Psalm 19*

## **1 Jesus - not a role model!**

I'm typically inclined to hold up Jesus as a role model, an example for how we might best live our lives. But today I'm not so sure! On the face of it, I want to caution that today's Gospel reading is not a lesson in how to behave at church!

The cleansing of the temple in John chapter 2 is at the same time funny and terrifying and confusing. This is not Jesus, meek and mild, as we are accustomed to seeing Jesus portrayed. John does not portray Jesus as polite and gentlemanly. In fact, Jesus comes across more like a violent extremist. If someone were to very literally do what Jesus did on our own church campus, indoors or out, there's a pretty good chance one of us would be calling the police to ask for assistance. We might even issue a trespass order to keep that violent and unstable person away.

This is a scary story, of a scary person I'm not sure that I want to be around. We read that Jesus made a *whip* of cords, he drove out the livestock, turned over the table stacked with coins, and yelled at everybody. Jesus was angry. Jesus' disciples see Psalm 69.10 come to life: *Zeal for your house has eaten me up; the scorn of those who scorn you has fallen upon me.*<sup>1</sup>

## **2 Zeal for you**

Zeal for your house. What is zeal? Remember one of the disciples is called "Simon the Zealot": one who belonged to a political party that might as likely as not use a knife or a sword in their partisan debates. Zeal is passionate concern, even anger, for a cause or an idea. It is the outrage of a parent who sees their vulnerable child being bullied by some other adult! It is the passion that God feels for God's people, the strong feeling that has caused God to extend God's mighty arm of power on behalf of God's people time after time. Sometimes to vanquish an enemy without. Sometimes to vanquish an enemy within their own hearts.

---

<sup>1</sup>BCP 680, Ps 69.10. In NRSV it is Ps 69.9.

Jesus cleared the Temple because the Temple was meant to be a place of worship, a place for people to draw near to God. That purpose was being subverted by the sellers of livestock and the money changers, so Jesus drove them out. Because Jesus was consumed, he was *eaten up*, by his compassion and concern that God's people be allowed to find God and not be *waylaid* by the hucksters outside. Jesus was clearing out what didn't belong in that space, what wasn't helping God's people to find God. And Jesus didn't seem to be concerned at all that the day's volume of sacrifices might be a little down as the result of the scene he created.

### 3 Today

What is God's Temple today? You can visit the Temple mound in Jerusalem, see the beautiful mosque that sits there. But there is no more Temple. As Christians we believe God makes God's temple in us, in our hearts. So if zeal, a righteous anger and outrage characterized Jesus' attitude toward the random street vendors he found within the Temple precincts in Jerusalem, what do you imagine Jesus' feelings are toward the disordered affections of our own hearts? These are exactly the kinds of things our Lenten disciplines are meant to help us to recognize and to address!

So we take those Ten Words from our first reading, the Ten Commandment, we take even that command to rest, to observe a Sabbath, and we have to understand them in this light. These are God's expressions of *love* for us, God's whip-of-ten-cords designed to cleanse us from everything that would trip us up and hold us back and prevent *us* from drawing close to God. The law of God is a series of lessons in the nature of God's love, a love characterized by its active zeal! Like a nurse piercing your skin to inject a life-saving vaccine, Jesus is that fiercely determined lover of your soul who is willing to *do what it takes* to love you genuinely. Even if it means knocking over a few tables or offending a few people along the way.

You'll note, too, that Jesus' zeal was not turned toward doctrines and spiritual niceties. Jesus wasn't paying attention to who genuflected at the right time in the liturgy or who knew the words by heart. Jesus was concerned with actions, with people who took advantage of one another, with how they treated even strangers, people they didn't know and for whom they felt no personal responsibility. Whenever there are people hurting in the world, whether I think I bear any fault for their condition or not, Jesus is calling *me* to repentance, to change, to righting the wrongs that I've done and even those that I think had nothing to do with me.

I have to tell you, it's hard to pray that God turn over tables of my life, and drive the sacred cows that don't belong. Because if that's what is best for my soul, then I believe God, in God's love, will answer my prayer and do it! So my flesh rebels and wants to hold on to those things that I think make life comfortable, pleasant, or affirming.

But God is offering something better than whatever it is I'm holding onto. That is the promise handed down to me by the church, by my family, and by my Christian sisters and brothers. It is the promise that resurrection waits on the other side of the cross. The promise that God is waiting to enter in to the space that I clear out for God, during Lent and every season. And Jesus stands willing to help with that work. Jesus the carpenter, it turns out, is good at demolition.

Zeal for God's house, zeal for our hearts, *still* consumes Jesus, *still* characterizes the very essence of God. God's zeal for you burns just as brightly today, offering to burn away every distraction and every false path, so as to leave you to enjoy forever the pure, unblinking flame of God's Holy Spirit, burning for you. **Amen.**