

## Cleansing of the Temple

The focus is the events that are leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection

These happen over a period of one week

Also known as Passion week – due to the focus on the suffering or endurance of Jesus, but I like to think of the Passion that Jesus showed during his last days before his crucifixion. By looking at the events of Passion week we see the things that he was passionate about and so what we as Christians can be passionate about as well.

Event of interest today is when Jesus clears out the Temple in Jerusalem. What was the cleansing about then and now? I'm going to look how this could translate into 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity

Interestingly, this is one story that appears in all four gospels although there are a few differences. The major difference is in John's gospel where the clearing of the Temple occurs early in Jesus ministry and is not part of his final week. It is also the most in depth account and refers to him making a whip to use. So, there may have been more than one occasion when Jesus cleared out the Temple. I'm going to read the account from Mark

Mark 11:15-19

**Three areas that going to cover that show the things that Jesus were passionate about in the action of clearing the Temple. These are themes that as we examine them are consistent with the rest of Jesus' ministry**

1. Justice
2. Inclusion
3. Disruption

## Justice

Acting justly is a sense of acting when you know something to be wrong especially in a legal sense. It's also the idea that seeing things that are unfair and doing what is fair. It's taking action to set things right. How does the clearing show Jesus' concern with Justice and a sense of fairness and trying to set things right?

- Money changing – illegal for using coins with any image on them. Roman currency have Roman emperor. Showed who was boss and allegiance to be given to. Jewish laws determined that to have another image on coinage was to have another god and setting up a graven image ie First two commandments. So, the only currency that could be used to pay Temple tax was in the shekel. Needed to change money – there was a charge to do this and this could be exorbitant. Especially at Passover time, the major trade in Temple happen here. Jesus saw this as an unjust situation and threw their table over scattering coins
- The trade in sacrificial animals. Needed perfect sacrifice, unblemished. The chances of getting perfect sacrifice from anywhere in the country to Jerusalem without getting damaged was unlikely, so the majority of people left sacrificial animal to buying at Temple. Invariably there was a huge mark-up on these animals. Clearly an unjust situation which Jesus reacted to.
- Other unjust situations – often directed at the religious leaders who had the appearance acting justly but were really not interested in protecting the vulnerable. Instead became the problem of that person's sin (eg blind man) and not their responsibility to protect. Jesus lived out acting justly to all regardless of background eg Syrophencian woman

Not a new theme, OT prophets were about injustices within society and also recognised same situation within temple, and the treatment of the least of these ie widows, orphans and foreigners

Micah 6:8. But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women.

It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor,  
be compassionate and loyal in your love,  
And don't take yourself too seriously—  
take God seriously.

### Amos 5:21-24

"I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religion projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to *me*? Do you know what I want? I want **justice**—oceans of it. I want fairness—rivers of it. That's what I want. That's *all* I want.

- Leviticus 19:15
- "Don't pervert **justice**. Don't show favoritism to either the poor or the great. Judge on the basis of what is right.
- God hates unjust situations, we should too. What are some of the issues for injustice in our society today and what can we do about them?

I always find this quote from William Booth founder of the Salvation Army an inspiration. This is from the last sermon in 1912 shortly before his death

"While women weep, as they do now,  
I'll fight  
While little children go hungry, as they do now,  
I'll fight  
While men go to prison, in and out, in and out, as they do now,  
I'll fight  
While there is a drunkard left,  
While there is a poor lost girl upon the streets,  
While there remains one dark soul without the light of God,  
I'll fight-I'll fight to the very end!"

— **William Booth 1912**

How can we put up a fight; against sickness, poverty, hunger, substance abuse, domestic abuse, slavery, loneliness, misery and spiritual affliction.

This is why as a Church we are involved in CAP because we believe that this is an issue of justice as we help those who have often been taken advantage of and find themselves in debt. It is also our way of trying to deal with poverty that is also an issue of justice and what is fair.

Philippa Goodwin and her work with the setting up an art fundraiser for Hagar was a practical way of dealing with injustice towards women in the sex slave trade by fundraising. Did you know that "Hagar" is organising a walk in the Stadium to Surf today to raise awareness and funds for their anti-trafficking campaign?

In my work with young people with intellectual and physical difficulties I am able to advocate for them because life has thrown them a curve ball and their families need someone to support and help them when something happens that is not fair. They often do not have a voice and they need to be heard which requires others to speak for them.

It doesn't matter whether it is local, national or an overseas issue of justice, the important thing is that if we see an unfair situation that we should do something about it. Jesus saw a situation that was not right and he acted by highlighting it through his actions.

We could see that the recent announcement of the closure of Cadbury's as an unfair situation and choose to do something about this. What can we do about this? There was a protest march yesterday to try and do something about this situation, maybe God wants some of us to join with this movement as well.

Have a think now about a situation that you think is unfair and may be able to do something about. Ask God to help you for ideas about what to do. It's better to choose one small area and make an impact with this rather than lots of different areas and not being able to achieve anything because you are spread too thin. It does not matter whether it is something big or small, with issues of injustice or unfairness, it matters and we are called to do something. It all matters to God

Acting justly requires *action*, not mere talk. Speaking about injustice — poverty, inequity, human trafficking, displaced people — may make us appear caring, but words do nothing to ease the pain of those suffering. Biblical justice is never divorced from acts of love and mercy.

## **Inclusion**

Going to watch now – want to look at this realising that this is the temple. What do you see? What does the scene remind you of? What do you think of Jesus' reaction?

What stood out for you from this clip?

## **Perspective on the Temple**

Describe areas of the Temple and where the clearing out took place

In the reading in Mark Jesus follows his action with teaching about the purpose of the Temple “a house of prayer for the nations, but it's been turned into a den of thieves”. With the trade that was happening in the Temple, it made it difficult for the nations/Gentiles to come and seek God. Not only for this group but there were others. Matthew has this addition that after temple area was cleared there was now room for the blind and crippled and Jesus was able to heal them. The Temple had become a place that excluded people and Jesus was not about this at all.

There should be no surprise in this as, from the beginning of scriptures God's inclusive nature is revealed. When he made his covenant with Abraham, it was about the land, it was about his descendants, but the purpose of this was so that all nations could be blessed and find God. All were included in this promise to Abraham. The way that the Temple was being used though excluded a large portion of society to come and worship God.

At the very start of his ministry Luke 4 has Jesus saying that his 'good news' is for all at every social margin – it's for the poor, the captive, the blind and the oppressed. He chooses to hang out and enjoy the company of those that are considered inferior by the religious leaders and others:

tax collectors, Samaritans and prostitutes. He has friendships with women and touches lepers. He teaches that we are not to judge others and practice acceptance of all. He wants us to be good employers and forgive debt. Overarching all of this teaching is Jesus' insistence that we love all and forgive regardless. Jesus' ministry was all about inclusion of everyone, his death and resurrection was not for a small subset of people but is for all regardless of who they are or what they have done.

In Matthew 25, with the final coming of Jesus, the excluded from the final banquet are those who have failed to look after their neighbours in need. They have not looked after the hungry, thirsty, homeless, cold, sick and imprisoned humanity.

The inheritors, however, of the kingdom have lived out the inclusive ethics of the kingdom. They have lived these out by looking out for whoever requires a hand regardless of who they are where they have come from, what they look like, how they live. Consequently the kingdom includes all who have put Jesus' words into practice and lived out his ethic and does not exclude people on grounds of ethnicity, gender, appearance, or any other physical difference.

The question that this raises in my mind is about Church today and has the Church become like the Temple of Jesus' day. Does the Church by its rules and practices exclude chunks of society of being welcomed and included and if so what are we going to do about this. If this is the case, then we have a major problem that needs to be addressed.

I revert to William Booth again as the reason why he founded the movement that was latterly known as The Salvation Army was because when he wanted to bring the poor and smelly into his church they were instructed to sit at the back or even asked to leave. He knew that the gospel was for 'the whosoever' and so rectified this situation by setting up a Church that was for the marginalised poor of society.

On a personal, level we each need to consider our exclusiveness in considering who can be part of the kingdom. It doesn't take long to reveal our own exclusive nature when you consider whether there are groups in society that you just don't want to hang out with or even dislike or distrust. I guarantee that we each have sectors of society that we would struggle to be with because of things like their race, socio-economic situation, sexuality, religious beliefs and lifestyle.

I'm going to share one, there are others, of my exclusive problems and that is with people who have bad hygiene. I really struggle with this, but Jesus calls me to love and include because God loves these people and they are made in his image and if I see someone like this in need I need to welcome them, care for them and love them in spite of my natural tendencies to run the other way.

The challenge for each of us is consider, who are those groups of people who we struggle with and who are the groups of people who might therefore be excluded from Church in our minds or those that we would struggle to have come and join us on a Sunday. Or, the other thing that we can sometimes do is say they can come and join us if they first change the thing we do not like. This is not the inclusive kingdom of God and it was what Jesus was saying when he upset the Temple.

### **Disruption**

Finally, Jesus caused a great deal of disruption with his clearing of the Temple. He turned the entire Temple upside down by bringing in uncertainty, disorder and an out of control situation. N T Wright suggests that the normal routines of the Temple would have been disrupted for up to 1 hour. One hour without the line of sacrifices continuing. He suggests that Jesus is highlighting to all about who he is. The purpose of the Temple was to point to the Messiah that was coming, but by the time he got there, everyone was so caught up in the Temple and its practices that

they could not see Jesus for who he was. The Temple was a signpost but everyone was caught up in looking at the signpost that they missed who it was pointing to. With causing a disruption, Jesus was trying to point out once again, and get people to take notice of him to realise who he was. It also set the wheels in motion for the final showdown with himself and the religious leaders who were now more determined to eliminate him permanently.

I love this aspect of Jesus, the fact that he was subversive throughout all of his ministry. Overstepping the boundaries of purity and respectability.

This is also echoed especially with the prophets of the OT who did things to gain attention to a message that God was trying to get out there. Elijah held an entire nation to ransom as he challenged to prophets of Baal to a contest about whose God could set alight a sacrifice with fire from heaven. He clearly caused a disruption on that day.

Jesus calls us each today to this same. I believe that he wants us to be subversive and counter-cultural challenging the status quo with disruption if necessary. This seems quite daunting especially if we are not so outgoing but the final words Jesus gave his disciples before he left was that he would be with us as we go about doing what he wants us to do until the end of the age. He is with us and the spirit that gave him strength is ours to have as well.

What does being disruptive look like? You know it doesn't need to be as dramatic as physically throwing people out of a space although it could be. It could be as simple as bombarding a person in a position of power with emails and letters about something that you think needs to be changed. It could be just a quiet conversation with someone who is behaving disrespectfully to others in the work place and so disturbing their way of being to bring about a positive change. There are many ways that we can bring about disruption. Our very presence in society as salt

and light in this world is sometimes disruption enough as we choose to live and respond differently to the situations around us.

### **Conclusion**

That's the end and I hope that there have been things in this that have made you feel uncomfortable, challenged or considering something that you could do or change because that was what the clearing of the Temple was all about – it was about challenging the status quo and getting a response. The response that Jesus got was to ultimately lead to his death and so this tells me that sometimes as Christians we will be hated for living the Jesus ethic.

Going to listen to a song by Graham Kendrick now to contemplate what are some of the things that we need to consider in lives as we head out into the week. You may need to ask for those around you to pray for you for guidance, support, encouragement do that if needed

### **Benediction**

