

WELCOME 17th March 2024 – 5TH SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B

Psalm 71:14-19 & John 2:13-22

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs...** The goal is for worship to be an all-week experience as God leads you into the fullness of His word & his work in your life & then introduces you to someone this week who needs to hear that word from you. We also use them for our **Zoom** Bible Study Catch-ups Friday 1p.m.

As we move into this week...

Pay **up** Pray **up** & Shut **up** That was the unkind assumption about how church hierarchies in denominational churches felt about the local congregation. Our role in the grand scheme of "the church" was: Make your offering. Show up for worship. Don't disturb the status quo... make waves...rock the boat...Leave the heavy lifting to the guys who went to had the positions of authority.

It was unkind, but it wasn't always incorrect. For how many years did many of us simply show up...do what we always did & go home & do it all over again in 7 days' time? It was mechanical...assembly line...auto-pilot...could have done it w/o thinking. Hmmm...

"In the Temple area Jesus saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, & doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money."

It was just such a status quo that Jesus encounters in today's gospel...buying sacrifices, offering sacrifices & going meekly on your way after performing a worship transaction...perhaps even done w/o thinking...**So...**

"Jesus made a whip from some ropes & chased them all out of the Temple."

Jesus overturns the assembly line business as usual of our lives so that as we receive his transforming love, we share it, welcoming those around us into the presence of the Father. To follow Jesus is to live how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you; allowing Jesus to transform the business as usual of your life into a mission to proclaim the mighty saving deeds of God & welcome others into the sanctuary of his presence...declaring...

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.
I will tell everyone about your righteousness.

All day long I will proclaim your saving power, though I am not skilled with words.

Let's pray & then live God's Word together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY:

Lord Jesus you held nothing back, not even your own life so that we could live alongside you as beloved children of the Father. Grow your Spirit in us so that we too hold nothing back...not from you, not from our families, or friends, all those around us for whom you also died & rose. Let your Spirit so fill us that we overflow in public praise & witness to you our Saviour, Lord & friend. Amen.

Let's hear & put our hearts into God's Word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. How does this event where Jesus is violently angry feel to you? What do you think angers Jesus still today?
2. What "table," or comfortable religious habit, does Jesus need to overturn in your life?

5TH SUNDAY IN LENT '24 B – DISCIPLESHIP BEGINS WITH A “W”: WITNESS

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, & doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. There's 3 words for that. Anyone want to guess what they are? Business as usual. That is normal festival business in the Temple after the exile. Worshippers travelling from all points of the compass to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration wouldn't always be able to bring the appropriate sacrificial animals or have the correct coinage to buy one. So an exchange & purchasing system was set up that was convenient for the worshippers & profitable for the Temple stewards...Jewish leadership. This was not an anomaly... a freak event...this is business as usual...& for the most part, I think that's why Jesus turns this mechanical assembly line worship event into something resembling a cyclone at the Wagga Show. I'll get back to that... BUT FIRST...

There's nothing inherently wrong w/ routines. Most of us live by them. We arrange our lives a certain way & follow pretty set patterns & habits in our work, school, & social lives. We are creatures of habit & order...ask my family about me. OTOH...don't! **BUT...** what happens all too often is we hit the auto-pilot button & live by rote...in our friendships, marriages, work, retirement, worship, parenting...we sleepwalk through life & do it all w/o thinking...w/o really engaging below the surface...everything is like a rock skipped across a lake. We show up but we're not really there. You're busy but you really haven't done anything. We allow what's crucial to give way to what's convenient & then slip away into complacency...

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover celebration, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, & doves for sacrifices; he also saw dealers at tables exchanging foreign money. Jesus made a whip from some ropes & chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep & cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, & turned over their tables. Then, going over to the people who sold doves, he told them, "Get these things out of here. Stop turning my Father's house into a marketplace!"

I started this morning w/ the old not-so-funny Pay up Pray up & Shut up; but to a large degree that's what you see here...Worshippers from all over reach Jerusalem, check into their lodgings & then go to the Temple. They exchange their foreign currency for the Temple shekel, use those shekels to buy the proper animals for sacrifice & for the feast, hand the sacrificial animal over to the appropriate priest who then prays the specific prayer & the beast is slaughtered & the worshippers go on to celebrate the rest of the festival w/ their family according to the law Moses received @ Sinai. From start to finish it's mechanical...assembly line...a series of religious business transactions...and it looks great. It's efficient, convenient, orderly, under control, profitable...just like a McDonald's. What's missing?

Oh IDK God? Jesus will later quote the prophet Hosea who spoke for God declaring God's heartfelt longing for his people... *I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I want you to know me more than I want burnt offerings.* – Hos 6:6 What's missing is the relationship God sought from the moment he crafted Adam & Eve in His image & set them free to enjoy the length & breadth of his garden as he walked w/ them around the place. What's missing is the relationship of love & obedience...trust & joy that was supposed to characterize the Passover...the annual celebration of God's grace that set them free from slavery & ushered them back into a life in God's presence, under God's protection & bathed in God's provision. What's missing is any sense that life under the Father is more than a series of religious deeds/duties to be done/dusted by week's end. What's missing is the relationship Jesus would later point to saying, *"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."* – Jn 17:3 Intimacy. Security. Purpose. Meaning. Hope. All are LOST under the banner of a religious McDonald's set up there in the Temple...the efficient orderly convenient robotic complacency of business as usual. So...

Jesus made a whip from some ropes & chased them all out of the Temple. He drove out the sheep & cattle, scattered the money changers' coins over the floor, & turned over their tables. This isn't about the leaders running a Bingo game in the parish hall or setting up a garage sale to pay for a new roof on the manse. This is about a relationship of love & responsive obedience & exultant sharing of God's gracious mighty work in their lives that has been distorted into complacent rote unthinking sleepwalking religion. So Jesus interrupts, disrupts, overturns, & throws out business as usual so that new abundant overflowing life/love/joy/peace that no status quo on earth can give come to life.

I love the reaction... *"If God gave you authority to do this, show us a miraculous sign to prove it."* "All right," Jesus replied. "Destroy this temple, & in three days I will raise it up."

NB: Jewish mind, "Temple" means stone/mortar edifice where God's presence is said to dwell. But in the incarnation, God taking on our flesh, blood & bones in Jesus, "temple" is now the lives of all who believe in, follow, & are indwelt by HIM. Kill me, Jesus says, & in 3 days not only will I be raised to life but in that moment raise all who trust in me to new life as well & create a world-full of living temples...that's you...*Do you not know you are God's temple & the Spirit of God dwells in you?* – 1 Cor 3:16 - -- *You are living stones that God is building into his spiritual temple. What's more, you are his holy priests. Through the mediation of Jesus Christ, you offer spiritual sacrifices that please God.* – 1 Pet 2:5 Kill Jesus & in 3 days his body, the church, will live across the whole earth in all who believe in him & the work of declaring God's mighty deeds & living out this new relationship of love & responsive obedience will continue unceasingly.

As the tables go flying & the sheep & coins scatter through the Temple, Jesus is actually looking at us...reminding us that life w/ him...life in his resurrection that we share through baptism dare not fall into complacency...convenience...auto-pilot non-threatening ease...a series of religious deeds/duties done/dusted in an hour or so. Life in Christ disrupts our lives & puts us out of step w/ a world that is intent on creating gods of its own & finding its identity purpose & meaning everywhere else but in Christ w/ the Father who made us for his love. Following Jesus transforms every part of our life, & that transformation is to be witnessed in & through how we live our daily lives...all of it: our decisions, friendships, marriages, work, retirement, worship, & parenting. Christ's dying & rising for us means he comes to dwell in us **so** that through us others have access to that same transformation.

AND THAT is the other issue Jesus confronts, disrupts, overturns, & throws out... This business as usual mktplace...is set up across the whole of the court of the Gentiles which was the only place in the Temple grounds where non-Jews could gather to hear & take part in the prayers, the Scriptures, the songs, the worship of God's people. The only place they could gather was now cluttered with sheep pens, bird cages, & currency exchange booths. A veritable barricade of pigeon poo & sheep dropping separated the curious & the perhaps interested from any access to Yahweh. Where was the devoted faith that proclaimed: I will always have hope; I will praise you more & more. I will tell everyone about your righteousness. All day long I will proclaim your saving power, though I am not skilled with words. Where was the vigorous faith that declared: I will tell everyone that you alone are just...I constantly tell others about the wonderful things you do...Let me proclaim your power to this new generation, your mighty miracles to all who come after me.

Business as usual had at the same time become a silence before the world & when God's people are silent the world is shut off from one channel of its access to the Father. When we are silent about our hope or our joy or our comfort & security in Christ we prevent people from meeting Jesus in a real & living way as surely as the mktplace cut the Gentiles out of the Temple. **Our** job as the church is not to prove to the world it is wrong but to prove to the world it is loved: || Even in this moment Jesus treats the world not like a battlefield but as a harvest field that the workers have messed up. He's angry, violently so, not w/ sinners who are clamouring for reconciliation & forgiveness, but w/ those who are so sure they know God's mind that they've blocked the sinners' path to those gifts. Our job as the church is not to prove to the world it is wrong but to prove to the world it is loved.

Motivated by love & driven by a faith that believes only Jesus can give people the life that enables them to flourish we walk w/ Jesus such that all we are is absorbed in

him...we trust **HIS WORD** to determine our identity & shape our life & walk **HIS WAY** everywhere we are every day we live. Pay up Pray up & Shut up is not your mission statement nor is it the vision of this church... Christ's dying & rising for us means he comes to dwell in us so that through us others have access to that same transformation & so that will take place, Jesus overturns the assembly line business as usual of our lives so that as we receive his transforming love for us, we share it, welcoming those around us into the presence of the Father. Discipleship begins with witness, the witness of our lives as those transformed by life with Jesus.

To follow Jesus is to live how he would deal w/ people & circumstances in your life as if he was you; allowing Jesus to transform the business as usual of your life into a mission to proclaim the mighty saving deeds of God & welcome others into the sanctuary of his presence.

TAKE IT HOME - As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

What "table," or comfortable religious habit, (or hiding place) does Jesus need to overturn in your life so you can invite & welcome others into the sanctuary of the Father's presence?

Let us pray...Lord Jesus come alive in us today. Fill us with your Spirit and your strength. By your Word and your Spirit move us into your world to share with others the life and love we have received from you. I pray right now for...
(silent prayer for those living distant from God's grace) In your name we pray...
Amen