

2015-03-08 Sue Diggory

Lent 3

Exodus 20: verses 1 – 17 & John 2: verses 13 - 22

People are everywhere, bustling about, being busy with so many different languages filling the air– **they really had come from far and wide**. The city is claustrophobic, **but** at last the long journey is over. Thank goodness we had booked accommodation in advance! We're here in plenty of time, time for a wash, time for a relaxing meal, time for a rest, time to get ready, **ready for tomorrow**.

How do you feel when you're getting ready for something special, **really special**, something you have wanted to do for a long time? You've done the planning, packed the bags and finally the time has arrived. It's the first time you've been there and thoughts are racing round and round in your mind, will it be like you've pictured it in your mind, will your expectations be fulfilled or will you be disappointed?

Passover is always a busy time and at last the steps of the Temple are in sight, at last time to be alone with God, but instead of the solemn dignity and murmur of prayer there is a deafening noise, instead of brokenness and contrition, holy adoration and prolonged petition, there is noisy commerce – sheep bleating, people shouting , **and the smell** – all those animals in such a small space and on such a hot day, not quite the way your mind had pictured this moment, not quite the serene atmosphere you had expected.

Suddenly He bursts in, **there is chaos** – more shouting, pigeons flapping, animals and people running all over the place, Priests red with rage, tables being thrown over, coins clattering to the ground, money changers scrabbling on the ground not wanting to see their profits roll away into dark corners.

There in the centre of the courtyard is a young man, nothing special to look at, at first glance just an ordinary man, corded whip in hand driving out the animals and shouting about his **Father's House**; Jesus is in town, **Jesus is causing chaos!** Jesus is turning the Temple upside down. **"How dare you turn my Father's house into a market"** he yells.

Is that what we expect to find, is this how we picture the special place to be, the place where we come to worship and to pray? Do we expect Jesus to come and turn things upside down, do we want him to come like this, or do we only want 'Gentle Jesus meek and mild in our lives' **do we really want him to disturb our lives? Or more importantly are we prepared to allow him to?**

There was of course nothing wrong with the temple courts being used to sell animals for sacrifice, or the money- changers enabling Jews and gentiles from the then known world to buy what they needed with Temple money, nothing wrong with making it easy to buy all that was needed for worship. Nothing wrong with helping people come close to God. So why did Jesus get so angry? What was all the fuss about?

Enabling worship or filling the Temple treasury, making it easy to draw close to God or making a rich and easy life for the Priests and Temple officials – **had the religious leaders crossed the dividing line?** Had they allowed their interests to come first? Had they allowed a barrier to develop between man and God? Had they allowed the purity of worship to become compromised? For the non-Jews the Court of the Gentiles where all this was taking place was the **only** part of the Temple they had access to, the only place where they could pray and instead of solemn dignity and the sound of murmuring prayer, instead of the hush of adoration in worship there was the noise of commerce, the sounds of a market in action, the sound of profit for the Temple coffers.

The Father's House was no longer a house of prayer in the eyes of the Son, the Temple the earthly home of the Living God was no longer honouring the Father. Had they forgotten the commanding words of God heard centuries ago on Sinai that still echo in our ears today '... **I am a jealous God ... I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt You shall have no other gods before me ... You shall not You shall not ...**' Couldn't they just keep the animals to one side, just be content to exchange foreign coins for Temple shekels without the need for profit, why didn't they remember the words from Sinai and follow the Father who wanted their love, the Father who thundered '**You shall not**' because **He loved, the Father who wanted to hear their prayer murmurings in his house and not the cry of their market traders,** the Father who wants the same close and loving relationship with **all His children today.**

Nothing must come between us, nothing must get in the way ... so, how can we this Lent move closer to Jesus, how can we experience that hush of murmuring prayer in our lives, how can we remove the barriers of the past year? The physical Temple of course is gone, the animals are long dead, and now we come to Jesus the living Temple, the Temple that was raised up after three days in the tomb, the Temple who's inner rather than outer courts Jesus draws us into through our relationship with him?

How can we allow Him to clear away the things that get in the way, those things that get in His way, those things that come between us and Him, those things that stop us entering His Temple, those things that stop us staying there with Him, those things that spoil the purity of our relationship with him. **Are we prepared to trust that He will not cause chaos and turn our lives upside down, but rather trust that time spent with Him will bring us closer to the Father as we allow him to disturb our lives.**

Lent is a time when the world if it recognises it at all, urges us to give things up, give up the things we like - chocolate, puddings, sweets, that glass of wine with Saturday dinner. Society seems to be saying it is a time when frivolous fun and enjoyment should be put to one-side, **but of course only briefly and maybe only just a little, because of course it's only for a few weeks and the time to indulge will soon be here again.** However I suggest that there is little sacrifice or challenge here and very little room for growth, very little long-term benefit is likely to happen in just six weeks.

Surely, for us Lent should be more than brief abstinence from a few things we like, it should be a time for developing new habits, developing a taste for more solid spiritual food that will sustain us as we prepare to meet the risen Jesus once again on Easter day, a time to take things up, a time to spend more time with Jesus, a time to spend more time with the Father, and a time to spend more time with God's word. A time to come to the Temple and stay awhile, **but also a time to allow Jesus to turn us upside down as He draws us ever closer to Him**, a time for removing barriers, **but, in a way that will last beyond Lent, as we build up our relationship with Jesus, as we allow him to change us and disturb our lives.**

As we go through the next few weeks Jesus will want to clear away different things for each one of us –for some of us it may be to take things up – a devotional book, a longer time in prayer, for others of us it will be to put things down, maybe **fewer meetings**, or thinking twice before we eagerly say 'yes' to something, but for each of us it needs to be for more than the weeks of Lent.

It needs to be a time of learning, learning to trust that the young man who caused chaos in the Temple will not cause chaos and turn our lives upside down, rather that he will bring us closer to the Father as we allow him to disturb our lives.