

# Jesus transforms the temple

3 March 2024 – Lent 3

## INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today's Bible story is about **money**. I'm not sure if you get pocket money ... but it's a way of learning about money and what we can use it for.

Back in the time of Jesus there were two different types of money.

One type of money was used to buy things and sell things.

The coins were a bit like ours with the figure of a head on one side.

Then there was a second type of money used in church and at the temple. When you wanted to make an offering to the church – like we invite people to do each week – you had to use special church money.

So people had to exchange their normal money for this church money.

So there was a little bank right in the temple where people could swap their money.

And the people in charge of the temple bank were a bit greedy and took more than they needed.

One day when Jesus was visiting Jerusalem he went to the temple and saw what was happening – and he got really mad! Not only were the money-changers ripping people off but they were taking over the temple – which was meant to be a place where people could come and pray and worship God.

So how we use our money matters to Jesus – including being generous with our money to others – but putting aside our money so we can worship God also matters.

## BIBLE READINGS

We listen for the word of the Lord.

**Our ears and hearts are open.**

### ***Psalm 19 (responsively and imaginatively)***

The heavens are telling the glory of God;  
and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

**Look to the mountains and see everlastingness...**

Day to day they pour forth speech,  
and night by night they declare knowledge.

**Search both day and night and watch for God's glory ...**

There is no speech, nor are there words;  
their voice is not heard;

**Listen to the silence and hear wonders speak...**

yet their voice goes out through all the earth,  
and their words to the end of the world.

**Look to the horizon to hear a word about eternity...**

In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun,  
which comes out like a groom from a wedding canopy,  
and like a strong athlete runs its course with joy.

**Look to the sunrise and enjoy God's forever-promise...**

Its rising is from the end of the heavens,  
and its circuit to the end of them;  
nothing is hid from its heat.

**Look to the seasons and live God's rhythm...**

The law of God is perfect, reviving the soul;  
the decrees of God are sure, making wise the simple;

**Look to creation's order and accept its wisdom...**

the precepts of God are right, rejoicing the heart;  
the commandment of God is clear,  
enlightening the eyes;

**Look to justice and truth and feel their light...**

the fear of God is pure, enduring forever;  
the ordinances of God are true  
and altogether righteous.

**Look to God's word and recognise its call...**

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;  
sweeter also than honey, and drippings of the honeycomb.

**Look to God's commandments and taste their sweetness...**

Moreover by them is your servant warned;  
in keeping them there is great reward.

**Look to God's created order and know justice...**

But who can detect their errors?  
Clear me from hidden faults.

**Look to God's grace and know its forgiveness...**

Then I shall be blameless,  
and innocent of great transgression.

**Look to God's covenant and know its love...**

May the words of our mouths and the meditations of all our hearts  
be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer.

**The heavens are telling the glory of God.**

### ***John 2:13-22***

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, 'Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!' His disciples remembered that it is written: 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

The Jews then responded to him, 'What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?'

Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'

They replied, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?' But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

For the Word of God in Scripture,  
for the Word of God among us,  
for the Word of God within us.

**Thanks be to God.**

### **MESSAGE** Jesus transforms the temple

In today's passage, Jesus goes to the temple in Jerusalem and sees what is going on there, gets really mad, drives out the money changers and causes a big ruckus.



In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke this incident takes place during holy week, the week leading up to the events of Easter. The chief priests and scribes, whose power and authority came from operating the temple, are incensed at this direct challenge to their authority and actively start planning to kill Jesus.

The writer of John's Gospel, though, places the incident right at the start of Jesus' ministry. Perhaps it happened twice? Or perhaps John is trying to tell us something important about Jesus by placing the incident right at the start with its comments about Jesus' zeal for my Father's house and rebuilding the temple in three days.

But before we get into some of the implications of the story, I want to lead us in an imaginative contemplation of the story. This approach of immersing ourselves in the Gospel story comes from the Ignatian stream of the Catholic Church and invites us to imagine ourselves to be present in the scene described. You can use this method for other passages as you imagine placing yourself in the scene described.

So I invite you to close your eyes and imagine yourself walking into the outer courtyard of the temple in Jerusalem. It's a big uncovered space, maybe 80 metres across surrounded by fairly high stone walls. Everyone's allowed in here. Men and women.

Young people and old people. Jews and even Gentiles, that is, non Jews.



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As you work your way through the throng of people, what do you notice?

Is everyone just focused on their own business or are people stopping to talk with each other?

How about the people sitting on the steps just watching?

And what about up there on the parapet, overlooking the large courtyard, what are the priests and Roman soldiers looking at?

What does it smell like?

Over on one side there are cages with doves in them and a small flock of sheep.

They're the animals for sale for people to take into the temple.

It's part of how people worship God.

Then there's the money changers and bankers yelling over the noise of the crowd ...

'Come and get yourself a good deal over here! Best prices!'

People are haggling and getting annoyed ...

No I won't give you ten denarii for one of your lousy doves.

Last week it was only 7 denarii and that was a rip-off!

This is meant to be a place to **pray**. Somewhere to calm and centre yourself before entering further into the temple and meeting with God.

But it's so noisy. How can anyone focus on God?

Now here comes a man on a mission, with several others trailing along behind. I think it might be that prophet from Galilee, the one they call Jesus.

He's walking in and stopping to have a good look around.

Now he's going over to where the money changers and doves' cages are.

He's arguing with the people there. He's getting mighty upset.

Get out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market place. Get out!

Now he's going a bit bananas.

He's overturning the tables of the money changers.

Coins are flying everywhere.

Doves are moaning.

Oh o. Here come the priests, running. They look mighty angry too!

They start questioning this man Jesus ... prodding their fingers into his chest.

By what right are you coming in here and acting like you own the place?

By what authority are you doing this?

You, get out of here!

You can feel the menace in their voices.

But Jesus is speaking.

It's all gone awfully quiet. You could almost hear a pin drop.

What's Jesus saying?

Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again.

The priests can scarcely believe what they're hearing.

This man is crackers!

What on earth are you talking about?

Don't you know that it's taken 46 years to build this place?

And you're so clever that you'll raise it again in three days?

They're starting to laugh now.

They're treating Jesus as a mad man ...

But Jesus isn't quite finished.

He's speaking again.

The temple I'm talking about is not all these stones and walls.

He's pointing around the temple.

The temple I'm talking about is me, my own body.  
And then he leaves, along with his group of disciples.  
There's stunned silence as the crowd catches its breath ...  
... and wonders what has just happened here.  
You could pray now ... it's so quiet.

Who is this Jesus?  
Where did that fierce look in his eyes come from?  
He was certainly speaking from the heart.  
But I didn't quite get the bit about the temple being his own body.  
The temple is where God dwells.  
What was he saying? That God dwells inside of him?  
I wonder what he meant? And the three days bit?  
It's a bit confusing.  
Does it mean God also dwells inside all of us? Inside me?  
Wow! What an exciting morning it's been.  
But now it's time to go.  
I've got a lot to think about ...

And now when you're ready, come back to this space and this time.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is the Word of God who has come from God and entered our time and space, full of grace and truth.

In this Gospel, Jesus has an intimate and close relationship with God and continually calls God his Father. When Jesus speaks, he claims to speak words directly from God.

Now the Temple in Jerusalem was a special place.  
It was considered to be the very dwelling place of God on earth. It was the place you went to meet personally with God, to worship, to pray, to make your requests known to God.



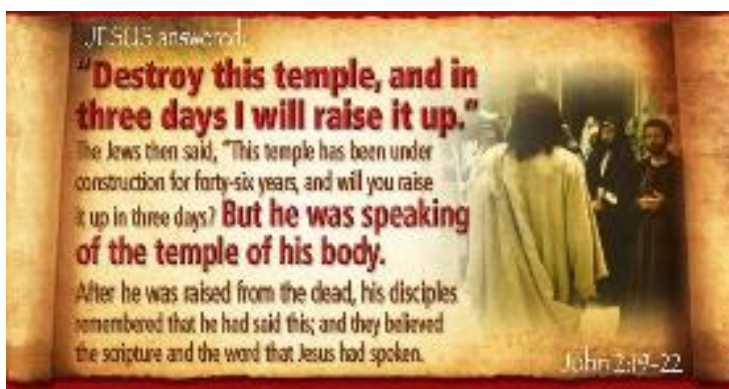
But it had become corrupted by commerce and become a market place.  
It was hard to worship God amongst the noise and bustle.  
Commerce has no place in the worship of God according to Jesus.  
People come to the temple to offer their worship of God not to buy and sell.

Jesus is outraged that greed and commerce have wormed their way into God's house, his Father's house, and so Jesus drives out the money changers and sellers. This cleansing is largely symbolic of course, for those same people will presumably be back again the next day, with the blessing of the priests.

But Jesus makes the point that right worship and right living need to go hand in hand. If we claim to worship God, then our ethical choices in everyday life have to match. In Mark and Matthew's version of the story, Jesus claims that the temple has become a den of thieves.

One of the readings set down for today is the 10 commandments, where love and worship of God (the first four commandments) is set directly alongside love for neighbour (the last six commandments). We don't

get to choose which of the 10 commandments we will follow and which we will ignore. It's a package deal. So right living goes hand in hand with worship of God.



Finally there is the exchange about Jesus destroying the temple and raising it again three days later. In Matthew and Mark this charge is brought against Jesus at his trial before the High Priest, but John places it early in his story and

expands on it. The reference to raising the temple in three days appears to refer to Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the third day.

So this is an early pointer to the cross and resurrection, and suggests that Jesus knew from the very beginning of his ministry that he must walk this path. His journey to the cross is no accident according to John.

But then there is this idea that Jesus himself is replacing the temple, that he is opening up a new way to worship God and have relationship with God – a new way through himself.

This is a huge claim. Later in John's Gospel, Jesus will suggest that to see him is to see the Father, to hear his words is to hear the words of God.

Jesus indwells the Father and the Father indwells Jesus.

When we pray we often end by saying that we pray in Jesus' name – because it's through Jesus that we can know God and approach God. We receive God's grace and forgiveness and know God's presence through Jesus.

According to the apostle Paul, we are to regard ourselves as God's temple on earth – not a building but a living temple made up of people – the body of Christ. So we can worship God wherever we are and whenever we gather together.

And so, mysteriously, when people look at us and how we live they get a glimpse of God's presence on earth – living in each of us. As we travel through Lent with Jesus, we might want to pause occasionally and thank Jesus for making this new way open to us, through his body – killed and raised for us.

### **CANDLE LITURGY**

On this third Sunday of Lent,  
we remember that Jesus renounced  
the traders' desecration of God's house.

**We too are called to renounce exploitation and injustice  
and reject the violation of God's world.**

We extinguish this candle  
even as we commit ourselves  
**to renounce and overturn damaging practices,  
reclaiming God's peace in the world.**

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