

John 2: 13-25  
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Lent 3B

Reverend Robin Sherman  
Friendship United Church, Demorestville, Ontario

I can't tell you how happy I am to have come to this scripture reading in our lectionary. Jesus gives us permission this week to be angry. Isn't that wonderful! Isn't it reassuring to know that Jesus got angry? We focus so much on his compassion and his love. He has taught us to turn the other cheek and love our enemies and then boom, full on, all out, anger. Wow, what a wonderful release.

I don't know about you but I have a lot of things to be angry about and may I say none of them have to do with who left the cap off the toothpaste or put the empty milk carton back in the fridge! No this anger is not about domestic issues that can lead to violence and the anger that provokes that kind of irrational, unpredictable reaction; although that is an important thing for us to talk about. This particular anger is focused, intentional, a reaction to the things of the world; the things we talked about last week, worldly things; the things that are **not** about following Jesus and focusing on God.

Things like: poverty, war, government corruption and mismanagement, slavery, starvation, oppression, the ozone layer, pollution, HIV, malaria, TB and cancer, homelessness, punitive rather than restorative prison systems, affordable housing, lack of sustainable farming, corporate greed, patriarchal thinking and hierarchal systems, gender equality, and the oil that seems to rule the world, those that have and those that don't.

Any of you get angry about these things? Guess what, these are the very same things that Jesus was angry about 2,000 yrs ago, with the exception of the ozone layer and pollution which the scientists didn't know about then and the oil that hadn't been discovered yet as the most sought after resource besides water. In any case you get the picture I hope.

These are the very things that we look at from a worldly point of view. If we saw them from God's point of view, with God's way of thinking they would not exist. Period. Because God doesn't think like we do, God didn't make us that way. God gave us free will; the ability to think for ourselves, to make choices and reason, and with that comes the freedom to feel a whole range of emotions that also include greed, hoarding, a need to control and many more things that keep us in this human mindset.

Now, back to our scripture, Jesus has become angry, he has had it and he tears up the marketplace at the temple. It may be helpful to realize that the temple was not simply a place of worship like our churches of today. The Temple was indeed a mall-like place. Picture the Quinte Mall in Belleville but in the middle of all the shops is a place of worship. In ancient times the Jewish people as part of their tradition were to bring

sacrifices to the Temple to pay off their debt to God, this would ensure they had good health, or a good livelihood etc. The bigger the sin, the bigger the sacrifice and so the market was there not just for regular shopping but also to buy your doves, and lambs or whatever you needed to sacrifice according to the direction given by the Priests. This was lucrative for the priests as well because they were the ones who got to eat the cooked meat after those who sacrificed it went home; the Priests benefited from the sacrifices made not necessarily the person who made it.

Now, perhaps you have heard this before but here is the real reason why Jesus is angry at the Temple. It was because this beautiful place of worship where God felt so close and forgiveness flowed like a fountain, this sacred space for people to come and become exuberant with praise for God or passionate in confession and commitment had become instead a place where people were being taught that they had to buy God off by fattening the pockets of merchants and religious leaders. The rituals and practices of faith were being used to place heavy burdens on people, not to bring them joy or hope. God was being made to look like the old defeated idols, vain and quick to anger as opposed to the portrait painted in the Psalms and Prophets. ***Jesus is angry that faith had become a vehicle for punishment and pain rather than doors to freedom and peaceful community***". (Stackhouse, Rochelle A. *Lectionary Homiletics*, Vol. XX, Number 2 p. 64)

Does this sound familiar to you? Can you think of any examples of this kind of use of religion? Think about all the places you have read about in papers or seen on the news that so called "religious groups" are responding to social issues with hate. They go to places they should not be and yell and scream hateful words at people. They turn up at funerals and health clinics and prisons and they spew words of hate at already hurting people. This is not what God wants from us. This is not the God Jesus came to reveal to us. This is not the way we show our faith and love for God. ***Jesus is angry that faith has become a vehicle for punishment and pain rather than doors to freedom and peaceful community***

As Christians we follow a loving, forgiving, healing Messiah, Jesus, right to the heart of God. Christians are supposed to follow Jesus Christ the light of the world who came to rid the world of these notions, not encourage and create fear mongers who judge and condemn and spout their anger. When Jesus drives out the merchants in the temple he is ridding the temple of those who use God to cover their true identities; those whose faith had become a vehicle for punishment and pain rather than doors to freedom and peaceful community.

It is unfortunate that this story of Jesus clearing the temple is also used by those with misguided anger. Let me give you some examples, Slobodan Milosovic died recently in prison, but in his life was a man angry about the things that had happened in his country over the past 100 years and like Adolf Hitler felt the anger that he infected a whole nation with was justified and so his actions and Hitler's, lead to the worst atrocities of our time. Was his way of cleansing the temple through genocide and other war crimes the same as Jesus way of chasing out the merchants?

And how about this example, Matthew Shepherd, beaten to death because he was gay and hung on a fence post down a deserted country road. During his funeral a religious group showed up outside the church where his family and friends had gathered for his funeral and shouted derogatory names and slogans and held signs of hate. Are these the actions of Christians who follow a loving, healing, peace seeking God?

How about the groups of religious people who gather in front of clinics and hospitals where abortions are being performed; even bombing the clinics or shooting the doctors and nurses who work inside. Is it really up to us to say what is best for mother and fetus? We can only hope that they have weighed all of their options and have made the best prayer filled decision they can. But the groups that gather outside don't know what the story is, don't put themselves in their shoes, don't even know the people they are judging, they simply spew hate.

***Jesus is angry that faith has become a vehicle for punishment and pain rather than doors to freedom and peaceful community.***

I have brought up some of the most controversial examples very deliberately. The legacies left by these examples I have given are well known and they do not leave a legacy of love and peace. It is a reality of our world that there are many things to be angry about but we must not lose sight of what God is calling us to do. It is easy to fall into that pit of despair and hopelessness that anger brings but we are God's forgiven people and that means something. We are called to go out with hope of resurrection; to bring joy and to know that our loving, forgiving and peace filled God is with us.

Jesus got angry many times in his ministry. At the Pharisees for their corruption of faith; at the disciples for not getting it time after time, at God in the garden of Gethsemane. It is part of being human; but he also knew it was not God's way. His final proof came on the cross, when perhaps he should have been his angriest and instead he says, "forgive them". God's way.

Amen