

Sunday 4th March 2018

3rd Sunday of Lent, St Andrew's, Cobham

Exodus 20.1-17, 1 Corinthians 1.18-25, John 2. 13-22.

'Our lives in continuing worship to God.'

“Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!” Those are Jesus' stormy words from John's gospel to the vendors and money changers in the Temple at Jerusalem. What was wrong in the Temple that day to make it like a market-place and why did Jesus act as He did?

I wonder when was the last time that you went to a proper market? That is, a market with different stalls and sections selling fresh meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, dairy products and all the other produce that we have readily available to us nowadays in our sanitised local supermarkets.

I remember going to the market with my Mum as a young girl, not always one of the fun trips out in those days; the market was outside so it was often too hot! I remember the smells of the different foodstuff, which were not always pleasant - particularly the smell from the fish section! I also remember that the market was a crowded, noisy and busy place

with lots of people milling around – from the traders trying loudly to entice you to buy their goods to the buyers bartering, trying to secure the best price for the produce they are buying.

The trudge of dodging around people, trying to keep up with my Mum, famous for her long strides, as I tried to make sure that I did not lose sight of her or get left behind. Really not a fun day out.

So, this was probably the type of chaos that Jesus finds when he arrives at the Temple for the Passover Feast. The Temple at Jerusalem was at the heart of the Jewish faith, the centre of worship and the Feast was an important festival, celebrating their liberation and freedom from slavery. Many adult males, made the pilgrimage to the Temple to celebrate, so I'm sure there were lots of people arriving from different towns and villages, all there to worship at that particular time.

It was not odd to have money changers and vendors selling animals at the Temple in those days either. There was a tax – the Temple tax that pilgrims needed to pay and only a particular coinage was allowed in the temple area, so the money changers were there to exchange the local Roman and Greek coins for Jewish coins.

Of course, like any good Bureau de Change there was a commission involved, not always a fair one, and paid not once but twice to the money changers as the pilgrims exchanged any Jewish coins back to their normal currency, on their way out of the Temple. So the poor pilgrims to the Temple, were being cheated of money that they could ill afford.

The people selling cattle, sheep and doves were there because only pure and unblemished animals were acceptable for sacrifice at the Temple; anything brought from outside the Temple was often deemed unsuitable and rejected by the appointed inspectors. Again, the pilgrims were being cheated, as they were made to pay inflated prices for the 'perfect' sacrificial animals only available at the Temple.

These poor people were being exploited and made even poorer – for the sake of religion, before they'd even had a chance to worship properly in the Temple. I'm sure this exploitation and social injustice was obvious to Jesus, the champion of the underdog and perhaps contributed to His fiery reaction at the Temple.

Another reason why Jesus reacts the way in which he did is clarified in the other three gospels. In Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem occurs towards the end of His ministry, and not at the start as

seen here in John's gospel and we're told that the money changers and the vendors encroached into the temple area, the only section designated for the Gentiles to gather for prayer and worship God.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus says "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers!'" He accuses the Temple officials, the money changers and traders of obstructing the people from their main purpose for being at the Temple, from doing what really should be taking place at that time – which is, worshipping God.

By allowing the court of the Gentiles to become a noisy, smelly marketplace, the Jewish religious leaders were not only divesting the temple of its sanctity and taking financial advantage of the people, *but* they were also preventing the people from worshipping God.

So, where are we in the gospel story before us this morning? Are we in the court of the gentiles, too busy with the hustles of life around us that prevents us from worshipping God - from knowing Him and sharing His love with others? What are the things that we have in our lives that stops our lives from being a continuous act of worship to our Lord?

God loves us and He is amongst (with) us all the time - this we all know. I am sure if I asked for a show of hands of who loves God this morning, everyone would put up their hands (at least I hope you all will). We are happy and comfortable when we gather together in fellowship to worship as we are doing this morning, singing and praising God, praying, breaking bread together, it is a good thing for us to do and it brings joy to our hearts (and God's too)! When we worship Him, we are giving Him due reverence, expressing our thanks, our praise and adoration to Him. It makes us feel good.

So why do we not do it all the time?

Our act of worship cannot be limited to just the time we spend in corporate worship on Sundays (or for some others on Fridays). God is always in our midst and we hopefully meet with Him regularly in word and prayer. His love and grace, He so freely gives to us in the hope that we too, can boldly share them with others - be it at home or at work, in fact everywhere we go! - as a continuing act of worship in our daily lives.

So, are there things we can actively do to 'work out' or continue that act of worship in our lives. Maybe we can make a conscious decision to take

a moment to reflect and bring God into the daily situations we encounter in our lives, before we react and take action.

Or maybe making a habit of praying for others regularly – a neighbour or friend we know who needs our prayers or someone from our church prayer list - we make a conscious effort to include that person in our daily prayers.

The church needs volunteers, to serve coffee after the service, to help clean the church, to be a church watcher, to be the friendly face in the welcome area. These activities only require a small amount of our time.

In this way, worship is not just between us and God, something we do only when we come to church or when we pray in private, but we are in a continuous act of worship as we share it with and include others around us.

This period of lent is usually a good time, as Christians, to do a little bit of spring cleaning as we reflect on the depth of our faith and discipleship to Christ. It provides us with the opportunity to ask difficult questions of our ourselves about how we live out our faith in service to God and others. It also gives us an opportunity to reflect on how we can channel

our lives to be in continuing worship to God. It might therefore be a good time to check and see what our worldly distraction that stops us from doing this are, as individuals or as a church family and ask for God's help to cleanse them from lives.

So we thank you heavenly Father, for giving us this time to reflect upon our discipleship. We ask that you please deepen our faith and strengthen our commitment to you; cleanse from our lives of the things that keep us from fully knowing your presence in Christ. Teach us how to worship you daily, in reverence and in faith so that our lives may be a continuing act of worship to you. We pray this in Jesus name.

Amen