

The Clearing of the Temple John 2: 13-25

This might not apply to you at all, but most people tend to idolize someone - politicians, or movie stars, or music celebrities, or professional athletes.....Think for a moment about meeting any of these people – Bobby Hull, Wayne Gretzky, Celine Dione, Justin Trudeau, Tom Brady, Shania Twain, Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Prince Harry.....whoever it might be for you, what might meeting them be like? What if you were to meet Jill who is a senior cashier at Michaels, or Bill who works in the lighting depot at Home Depot.....would you act and feel the same, regardless who you met? Even though we hear that even the rich and famous also put their pants on one leg at a time, would you tend to be in awe of them? Do you imagine that their life must be so much better than yours? Might you be idolizing them? And when we idolize someone we limit our understanding of them....for better or for worse. We see only who we want to see.

Some world renowned Biblical scholars and theologians suggest that Christians often run the risk of idolizing Jesus – Christians they say, often paint a very idealistic, limited picture of Jesus. They see in Jesus, only what they want to see. In so doing, they fail to understand and appreciate the true and full essence of God.

As a child, I had painted a very detailed and unblemished picture of the life of my hero -Roy Rogers. I wonder if I have done the same thing, when it comes to Jesus Christ. I offer for your consideration, if you might have done anything similar.

There are iconic paintings of interpretations of Jesus -/ meek and mild, carrying a lamb upon his shoulders,another of him in the glow of a lantern, knocking on a door, and humbly waiting in the hope that someone might answer it and welcome him in....another sitting on a rock while children gather on his lap and at his feet... Gentle Jesus, meek and mild.....isn't that the Jesus we know and love?

It turns out, that my hero, Roy had more dimensions to his life than I had imagined. Roy had challenges and difficulties, successes and failures, times of great joy and times of tremendous sorrow. He was often happy and humble and easy going. But sometimes he got angry or sad and hurt. I had no idea. All I saw, and likely all I wanted to see was Roy on Trigger, Dale on Buttermilk and they were singing Happy Trails To You. They had just solved another mystery and had put some bad guys behind bars. I only saw a small portion of who Roy was. Is it even possible that we might run the same risk with Jesus and thus see only a small portion of who God is.

Today's passage, John 2: 13-25 opens with Jesus, just before Passover, going up to Jerusalem and entering the temple, as was the custom of all Jews during this holy time.

In verses 14-17 John describes the rage that Jesus flew into and the fury that he created among the money lenders and the sellers of cattle, sheep and doves. Jesus was livid! He screams at them, "Get

these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Now it was customary to have animals and money changers in the Temple. It was a service provided for those who had traveled a long distance and wanted to buy an animal for sacrifice or have their currency changed.

The problem was that Jesus saw despicable extortion and injustice. Inflated prices were being charged. Worshippers needing to buy animals for sacrifice or have their currency exchanged were being grossly overcharged. The entire purpose for worship and the temple was being eroded. People were becoming obsessed with the finances. Enterprise and capitalism were taking over. Greed and exploitation were rampant. Their call to be children of God, their mission and ministry were being forgotten. Worship of and service to God, were being forgotten. Jesus hit the roof! Are you comfortable acknowledging Jesus as angry? Can you imagine the fury he must have felt when later on, he yelled at Peter, "Get thee

behind me Satan!” The Pharisees certainly never found Jesus to be meek and mild. He called them serpents.

Scholars agree that if this scene from John about clearing the temple had been recorded about anyone other than Jesus, it would have been universally accepted as the scene of violence that it was. But not everyone is comfortable with Jesus being angry and violent. So they try to explain his anger and rage away. These characteristics do not fit into their preconceived and preferred image of Christ. They think of this scene as a time when he acted out of character.

Think about it for a moment. Might your image of Christ be based upon the passages with which you are most comfortable, the ones that are gentle, pleasing and pleasant?

While it is true, that most of what we see from Christ is love, kindness, servanthood, forgiveness, we must not forget intolerance and indignation of those things he believed were wicked, evil, or unjust. The wrath of God is never thought of in scripture as opposed

to his holiness, but rather a necessary part of it. Not everything is ok. Some things are an offence to the holiness of our Lord. Some things are unjust. Jesus took a stand for God. We need to do likewise.

By the time we get to verse 18, the Jews ask him to show them a sign to justify what he has done. By the end of the gospels we get very tired of doubters wanting yet another sign from Jesus.....give us a sign....then we will believe. Give us another sign, then for sure we will know you are the Son of God.....

Jesus had just cleared the temple of money lenders and sellers of goods. The Pharisees wanted to know, on who's authority he had done this. This kind of authority was granted to judges - not individuals without office. Jesus acted on God's authority.

Show us a sign they said. Jesus responded with ,”Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” To which they responded, “This temple has been under construction for 46 years

and will you raise it up in 3 days?" But Jesus was speaking of the temple of his body and what he said was a foreshadowing of the terror and the mystery of the resurrection.

One of the important lessons from this passage is about the ongoing need for balance between the institution or corporate body, and individual faith, ministry, and mission. Trinity church is an institution and it is part of a larger one. The PCC is an institution that supports individual congregations in many many ways. We need institutions. They provide guidelines, support and resources. But they have their limitations and sometimes they disappoint us or divide us. There are always times when our individual, personal faith must supply what cannot be found within the institution.

The clearing of the temple....one of the most visually dynamic images from the Gospels. What can we take away from this today?

At least two things I hope:

#1. Jesus was truly human, and truly divine. In this passage we get yet another glimpse into his humanity. He was loving and kind and unselfish and forgiving. But he also had times when he felt unsupported, betrayed even. Times when he was angered by injustice. How big is your picture of Jesus? How limited is your picture of Jesus? My guess is that your image of God is likewise.

#2. We do not live our lives in a bubble. We live in communities. Communities have institutions. Much of what institutions do are helpful, but sometimes they too go astray. As individuals and as members of community, we are always called by God to take a stand for justice. The hymn **Make me a Channel of Your Peace**, also known as **The prayer of St. Francis**, says it well.....where there is hatred let me bring your love, where there is injury your pardon, where there is doubt faith, where there is hatred, love, where there is darkness, light, where there is sadness, joy. Staying strong in our personal faith will equip us to develop and maintain strong, healthy

communities and institutions. It is our job to help build those institutions and to keep them on the right path of justice, for God's glory. Amen