

John 2: 13 – 22 Tantrum in the Temple
Newtonbrook United Church March 15, 2009
(Another drama in two parts)



(Peter enters the chancel.)

You remember me – no? My name is Peter. I'm one of the disciples of Jesus and today I want to tell you about what happened one time when all of us went into the temple to worship the God who loves all of us.

It happened just before the Passover. We went into the temple and we saw people selling cattle, sheep, and doves. We also saw the money changers who were sitting at their tables. All of this was perfectly normal.¹ Everyone seemed happy. No problem! Wasn't that the purpose of the temple – through worship, to have everyone feeling peaceful, satisfied, comfortable?

Jesus over-reacted though. Now, I want to explain the role of the money changers because you folks in the 21st century may not have money changers in the places where you worship – just like I didn't see anyone selling sheep or doves when I came here today. In the temple we had to pay our temple dues in Jewish coinage. However, most of us were accustomed to using Greek or Roman coins every day; so, we had to exchange them for Jewish coins. It was all quite normal.

Jesus over-reacted though. It was embarrassing. It was deeply upsetting – if I can use that word – to have this scene disrupt people who were in the temple to worship. He had seen all of this before; he knew that that was the way that that was the way things were done. People had to change their money.

Jesus over-reacted though. It was upsetting. Jesus made a whip and chased the cattle drovers and sellers of doves out of the temple. THEN he went to the area where money was being changed and overturned the tables. Money spilled all over the floor. You can imagine how upset people were! He shouted, "**Stop making my Father's house a marketplace.**"²

¹ Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, page 300

² John 2:16

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We remembered the words of Psalm 69:9 : "***It is zeal for your house that has consumed me.***" Jesus was acting like a zealot – or you might say a fanatic; a militant. It was as if he had become one of those social justice activists who are always going on about the differences between the rich and the poor.

Quite frankly, it was embarrassing for us as disciples!

Why would he make a scene like this?

(Peter leaves and Jesus enters the chancel.)

Peter is a good man. He is struggling to understand my message and I hope that he will come to understand why I was so angry that day, and that he will question the purpose of the temple.

Yes, on that day I was consumed with zeal for God's house – just as Peter quoted from **Psalm 69**.

Yes, everything was "normal" when we arrived at the temple – and I knew that it would be that way. Money changers at their tables, sellers of cattle, sheep and doves, I knew that would be happening.

No, I didn't "lose it." No, I don't regret driving them away, and overturning the tables of those who were engaged in foreign exchange. If I had it to do all over again, I think that I would do the same thing.

It is like this – what is the purpose of the temple?

What is the purpose of the place where you gather in the 21st century to worship the God who has given you life, and who loves you?

What I saw that day was pure and simple exploitation of the poor by a group in the priestly class who were in control of many of the commercial enterprises in the temple precinct.³ The money changers were the street-level representatives of prosperous interests of considerable power – they were symbols of an oppressive financial system.⁴ The rich were becoming more affluent, while the poor suffered. Religion had become a business helping this to happen – and supporting it in the name of "peace". What did all of this marketplace activity have to do with the purpose of the temple?

³ Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, page 300

⁴ Ched Myers, Binding the Strong Man, page 301

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You may know that our great prophet Isaiah wrote about the temple being a house of prayer for people from all nations⁵ - and the corruption of Israel's leadership. The purpose of the temple had been despoiled and it had become "a place where, for a fee, one could be assured of divine pleasure without interrupting one's way of living, the purpose of the temple was utterly debased."⁶ What galled me was that people believed they could at least partially buy God.⁷

I always wonder about its purpose when a religious institution exists for comfort, to the exclusion of challenge; of places where there is empty talk of peace and joy with distant, vague appeal. I remember the prophet Jeremiah and his words about how dishonest it is to say, "**Peace, peace, when there is no peace.**"⁸

I have told Peter, and the others, about the sacrifices that are required to be my disciples. I've even said that they will have to **take up their cross – to lose their life in order to save it**⁹.

I've told them, in contrast to the bromides that are offered in the temple about worship and peace, not to think that I came to bring peace to the earth¹⁰. **I came not to bring peace, but a sword – my message will be divisive.**¹¹

I think that I would be very upset if, sometime after I'm gone, my disciples were to picture me as a pastoral presence wandering around with children hanging on my robes, and sheep in the background. My purpose was not to bring peace. That day in the temple was just a demonstration of my purpose in life – to bring good news to God's children.

Do they know the purpose of this place?

The temple has been under construction for 46 years. It is a building of beauty. Did people really know its purpose? Are they contributing to the temple, or to something beyond the temple?

I have been trying to show how the religious institutions of my day exploited the poor, and how they used power to maintain the status quo. That's what

⁵ Isaiah 56

⁶ Frederick D. Bruner, The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28, page 361

⁷ Frederick D. Bruner, The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28, page 361

⁸ Jeremiah 6:14

⁹ Mark 8: 34, 35

¹⁰ Matthew 10:34

¹¹ Matthew 10:35

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makes me angry. Is there a place of worship that is not geographical, but ethical? I've been telling my disciples that in God's realm the first must be last¹², and the least among you will be the greatest – to live as light, salt and yeast. Can we be a priesthood of all believers without a temple?

What is this temple for anyway?

Hymn # 80 in More Voices – Beyond the Beauty and the Awe



¹² Mark 10:31