

A Life For Us Cleansing

Psalm 19
John 2:13-22

"He scattered the coins and overturned the tables..."
John 2:15b (CEB)¹

Sometimes anger can be good. When we stand in the presence of wrong-doing...

When we see an injustice toward those who cannot fend for themselves...then anger is good... It is rightful and good for anger to *rise-up* within our mind and body and spirit in the face of wrong.

I

This story – from the opening scenes of Jesus' ministry in the gospel according to John – does not *directly* say that Jesus became **angry**...when he entered the Temple's 'Court of the Gentiles' on the eve of the Passover... But **the intent** of Jesus' actions and motives are clear:

- He made a *whip* of some marsh rushes.
- He *drove out* the livestock and *expelled* their handlers.
- He *overturned* the tables of the money-changers.
- He *poured-out* their coins on the ground.

'Them's 'fightin' words!'

And – in so doing – this 'out-of-towner'...this tourist...this 'come-here' to the big and holy-city of Jerusalem – upset scores of people...

He cleaned house – and gave heartburn to the religious elite!

What business was it of his? They murmured. *Who does he think he is?* Strutting into this holiest of sites, since the time of David – more than a thousand years before!

By what authority... *By whose authority...* does this Galilean **interloper** come and create such a fuss...interfering with the business and commerce of God's holy people?!

One had to admit... It was an interesting way to start a ministry...and to make an impression!

II

Likely (I will suppose – Correct me if I’m wrong...) what Jesus did in the temple that day – whip and lash in hand – *is not the way* we were taught to behave! No, we’re taught to keep our cool. “Don’t get mad...just get even!”

From my earliest memory – ‘stubborn Scot that I am’ – I was frequently told that I have a ‘bad temper’... (Perhaps, I *still do*). At any rate, I was often told – and reminded – to ‘control my temper.’

I suspect that I am not the only person here that was taught that the outward expression of one’s anger is *very* unseemly!

It’s why we have something called “anger management”! It may be okay to get ‘riled-up’ about something...just as long as we keep that ‘anger’ to ourselves!

Or is it?

It’s certainly not **what Jesus did** that day...*Now was it?* This is one – of only a hand-full of stories – that appears in *all four of the canonical gospels* – the New Testament... where Jesus *loses his cool*.

Whether it happened *early* in his ministry – as John suggests... Or, in the *last week* before Jesus is killed – as Mark, Matthew and Luke describe it...*it must have been quite a scene!* Certainly it was one that the disciples remembered, long after Jesus died, and was raised again from the dead.

III

So...when it is okay to lose your cool? When is it all right to get **angry** – and to let others know it? *What can we learn* from the *lashing* of Jesus’ whip...the *scattering* of coins on the temple grounds and the *overturning* of tables... What good comes from the expulsion of venders and money-changers from the sacred space that Jesus called ‘**my Father’s house**’?² *What’s the message for us...* who still get angry *over the practice of religion* – even today?

Well, one lesson could be...

We need, always, to keep an eye out for those who are taken advantage of by others.

Maybe you know what was going on here. It was the season of the Passover – when thousands of the faithful to God’s covenant swarmed to Jerusalem for the sacred festival. In the temple, the faithful Jews would... 1) offer a sacrifice, **and** 2) make a monetary offering.

To present these two gifts properly, each family had to obtain...

1) an unblemished animal – approved for sacrifice; **and** 2) proper coinage that did not bear the image of the Roman emperor (who thought he was god) – a sacrilege to the Hebrews.

Thus, of course, the Temple authorities were happy to oblige! *Step right up* and buy your ‘Temple-approved’ livestock – right here in the outer ‘Court of the Gentiles’! *Step right up* and we’ll exchange your *filthy money* with currency that is proper and acceptable in God’s sight!

Now, that may not seem to be all that bad. Initially, it was probably a good idea...and a service to those pilgrims who traveled great distances to the Holy City for Passover.

But then, somebody got greedy... More than one somebody, I suspect!

It was a simple matter of ‘Supply and Demand’. The people – many of whom were poor and common laborers – needed the sacrificial animals and currency... And the ‘temple approved merchants’ were more than happy to supply the exchange...and demand an exorbitant price or ‘cover charge’...likely with a nice little ‘kick-back’ to the ‘Fat Cats’ in robes who ran the Temple treasury!

Of course, this was **wrong**... *But what was a decent person to do?*

One could imagine a much-younger Jesus, observing his hard-working carpenter-father - Joseph – having to shell-out far more than he knew he should – for a sacrificial lamb or dove...obtaining also the proper currency at inflated rate...when Jesus knew this was not what his heavenly Father had intended!

So, now the adult Jesus – with followers and others watching and learning from his every move... **Now was the time to make a change!**

Once, I led a Service of Witness to the Resurrection for a very dear man, named "Al," who attended a church I once served.

Al was a veterinarian – who dearly cared for the small animals and pets commended to his practice. A large number of people gathered for his memorial service.

But among the memories that I will carry with me, of this rather quiet, humble, compassionate servant and doctor, was the depth of his convictions, and his honest and deliberate pursuit of them. One of Al's sons remembered...

"Dad always knew the right thing and had the strength to do it. (He was) the man who taught me that the strength of my conviction did not (always) correlate to the strength of my position, and that facts and reason were the route to find truth and right."

A nice way to be remembered!

IV

John does not tell us how the crowd in the Temple court *reacted* to the scene of divine fury... Only the reaction of the Jewish leaders is described. The disciples recalled the great 'passion' for the cleansing of God's house that seemed to consume Jesus – recalling the words of a psalm. (Psalm 69:9)

Yet, nothing is said of **the crowd's reaction**. I wonder... *What did they think?*

I would imagine that *they cheered*...

Cheered the actions of a just man – who stood up for the cause of decency and good.

Cheered the One who looked after the plight of the **poor** – who were stretched over a barrel by those who only 'see dollar signs' – who only want to make money for themselves (and their shareholders)!

Cheered for a man of God – God who stood in the midst – who was unafraid to stand against the corruption of any institution – even those who manage the House of the Lord (in the name of religion)... And who 'cleans house' of that which *oppresses* the poor and takes advantage of the vulnerable!

Yes, I feel certain *they cheered*...

Then and now...

When *challenge* is made to that which corrupts...

and

When *passion* for justice and truth arises
and will not be silent!

Then...

Sometimes *anger* – in the name of God who is *with us* – is good – a good thing!

Sometimes that holy and righteous anger we show can be *cleansing* and healing for us all!

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A sermon preached for the
Second Presbyterian Church
Petersburg, Virginia

Endnotes

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, the Scripture quotations contained herein are from the **Common English Bible** (CEB) – *a fresh translation to touch the heart and mind* (Nashville: Common English Bible, © 2011). All rights reserved.

² John 2:16b, CEB, p. 97.