

**Reading:** Mark 11.15-19

On Sunday I spoke about the way in which Christians need to follow the pattern of Jesus by reflecting on what's going on around them. I wonder what those first disciples made of Jesus' actions in the Temple:

- driving out the those who were buying and selling
- overturning the table of the moneychangers
- tipping over the benches on which the dove sellers sat.

Here was their hero causing a small riot at the very heart of Jewish faith and the centre of priestly power.

The story as it is told in each of the Gospel shows how significant it was and how it was interpreted in slightly different ways. Probably, Jesus' actions were a combination of factors:

- a cleansing of the Temple
- a protest against abuse
- a declaration that in him a new age was dawning.

Jesus wasn't the first person to "cleanse the Temple. Josiah removed the alters erected to other God and kicked out the priests.

More recently, Judas Macabaeus, cleansed the Temple after it had been desecrated by foreign invaders.

Jesus was declaring that the Temple was, to use our present phrase, "Not fit for purpose".

It should have been a place where men and women could encounter God in spirit and in truth.

The reality was that for most people it had become a place of commercial and spiritual trade and corruption.

There were widespread complaints against the way in which the high priestly families ran the Temple as a way of minting themselves a fortune.

The whole business of providing animals, changing money from Roman coins to Temple money, using the gifts of the poor for their own benefit had become a scandal.

What was more, the whole system seemed to be saying, providing you go through the motions, buy your animal, have it killed, then God is satisfied.

It was like people coming to church  
and feeling that providing they sang a few hymns  
and endured Colin's sermon,  
then God was satisfied.

It didn't matter how we lived  
or what kind of a society we were trying to create.  
Going through the motions was enough.

Whilst all this buy and selling and killing was going on  
there were also those coming to the Temple  
who did indeed want to pray.

The gentiles were not allowed into the heart of the Temple  
but were able to pray in the very place  
where the market in animals was established.

These people, impressed by aspects of Jewish belief and ethics  
were denied the opportunity to worship.

Beyond all this, Jesus may well have believed  
that this whole way of worship was coming to an end.  
Certainly those who reflected on this story later  
may have seen that Jesus was opening a way  
by which all people might know God  
and worship together.

Jesus was breaking down the old barriers  
and in the words of Isaiah creating  
"a house of prayer for all nations"  
no longer centred on a building  
but on the one who reveals the love of God for all people.

What does this say to us:

- perhaps that challenging corruption,  
wherever it is found, is part of our Christian obligation
- perhaps to ask whether our churches  
are places which enable all people to worship  
or whether unintentionally we exclude certain people.
- perhaps, that Jesus was willing to take a great risk  
to proclaim the new way through which people  
might know God and serve him  
and to ask ourselves what risks we're prepared to take.

In our communion we join with people of many races and cultures  
to recommit ourselves to the God who is Lord of all people,  
who unites with people from all nations  
in our commitment to him and to the world.

Thanks be to God. Amen.