

## Reflections for 7<sup>th</sup> March 2021

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent

#### A place for everyone

When we hear the gospel story of Jesus clearing the temple courts, it may surprise us that he seemed to be angry, and perhaps it surprised his disciples as well. But this story was clearly seen as important – it is one of relatively few events that is recorded in all four gospels. So was Jesus angry? The text of the gospel doesn't say that he was, but he was certainly stirred up to strong words and decisive action in the temple courts – so what was it that provoked him to react in this way?

When people came on pilgrimage to the temple, most had travelled a long way, and couldn't bring animals with them for the sacrificial offerings – so they needed to buy cattle or sheep or doves when they got there. And people had to make offerings of money in a special temple currency, and exchange their money to do that. So perhaps it was a bit like the way we find the prices at a tourist destination, or the exchange rates at an airport – where people have little or no choice, the prices tend to be high. And it is possible that the priests and religious authorities were in on the deal, exploiting those who came as pilgrims, and over-charging them for the things they had to do in order to worship there. So Jesus took action, and overturned the tables, and chased the merchants with their sheep and cattle, and the money-changers with their piles of money, out of the temple.

But, even if all this business and commerce had been done on a proper and fair way, to provide services that pilgrims needed, it was in the wrong place. Jesus spoke of the temple as 'my Father's house', and (in Mark's gospel) he quoted Isaiah, saying:

My house will be called a house of prayer *for all nations*

Jesus took strong action to clear the outer court of the temple, which was known as the Court of the Gentiles, and restore it to its original use, as a place that was open to all people, for them to come to the temple, to pray and worship, and encounter the living God.

Revd John Waller

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for your example of strong action,  
to defend the vulnerable,  
and to open a space where all are welcome.  
May we be prepared to stand up for what is right,  
and support those who follow your example. Amen.

Bible readings: Exodus 20. 1 – 17; 1 Corinthians 1. 18 – 25; John 2. 13 - 22

Story: 'The Kind Stranger' (based on the parable of the good Samaritan, Luke 10)