

Lent 3 Homily – 7 March 2021

Our Bible readings today include the Ten Commandments, God's instruction to his people on how to live well.

Even today in our post-Christian society most people know of the Ten Commandments and would see them as part of a moral code to live by. For most of us we understand that rules are there to be helpful. This past year we have had to live with lots of rules that we would previously have been very surprised to be asked to follow: Stay at home, keep your distance, wear a mask. These are rules that we have followed to prevent the spread of the Covid virus and to help keep everyone safe.

As well as these well publicised rules there are, in societies and cultures, many unwritten rules that are passed on almost subliminally. One such rule that many of us find ourselves living by is, "You shall not make a fuss." From our gospel reading today it is clear that it is not a rule that Jesus set much store by.

This story shows that anger isn't necessarily a bad thing. Jesus was angry. Anger can give us the energy and motivation to act against injustice and wrongs.

It is suggested that this was what fuelled Jesus' anger. This certainly seems the case in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. In these accounts Jesus remonstrates with those selling animals for sacrifice and changing coins into the special temple currency saying:

"My house shall be called a house of prayer" but you are making it a den of robbers.'

Our reading today, however, is from John's gospel and there is no reference to robbers or financial exploitation. Whilst the other three gospel writers put this incident at the end of Jesus' ministry, as he enters Jerusalem on the way to his final confrontation with the authorities, John puts it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This suggests, perhaps, that the

temple itself and its whole use is the focus of Jesus' action. Jesus comes at the beginning of his ministry, like a cleansing fire, clearing the ground for a new order.

When we see injustice or hear of someone being wronged we too may feel a sense of anger, and at the same time we may feel powerless to make a difference in any given situation. Many wrongs are covert and linger under the radar; situations that people know about but feel they cannot speak openly about.

During this Lent some of us are studying Ben Lindsay's book, "We need to talk about race". It is a powerful testament to Ben's faith and the injustices that face black and minority ethnic citizens in the UK and, even more disturbingly, specifically in the church in the UK. The majority of us studying the book are white and we have found ourselves challenged to address our lack of knowledge of black peoples' experiences and the racism that is around us in our everyday lives. It's a form of micro-abuse, that causes hurt and suffering to black and brown people but goes unchallenged and ignored by other members of the community.

To learn about such injustice makes all of us feel angry but we also feel unsure of how to take action. Perhaps the answer is in the title of Ben's book "We need to talk about race", to get this difficult and sensitive issue out of hiding.

Jesus' action in the temple exposed a practice that had become corrupt and polluted a space that was designed for the worship and glory of God. Wrongs that are hidden need to be exposed. This week for instance is Domestic Violence awareness week and we are challenged to consider this hidden evil. Many of us may be aware that many people have been in a dangerous situation during lockdown as the threat and actual incidence of violence have increased. How might we help to bring this hidden sorrow into the open so that help may be given and healing begin?

Jesus cleansed the temple, initiating a new order. During Lent we reflect on our lives individually and corporately as the body of Christ in this place. We

turn to God for forgiveness where we have caused harm and we seek God's way forward so that we may live and worship together justly and creatively becoming truly an inclusive church.