

ST PAUL'S (RONDEBOSCH)

SERMON

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

07 MARCH 2021

EXODUS 20:1-17// PSALM 19// 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25// JOHN 2:13-22

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Let us pray

God of wisdom and love, source of all good things, teach us your truth and guide our actions in your way of peace and love. Lord open our ears that we may hear you Open our eyes that we may see you and open our hearts that we may accept you. AMEN

One Sunday morning, a mother went in to wake her son and tell him it was time to get ready for church, to which he replied, "I'm not going." "Why not?" she asked. "I'll give you two good reasons," he said. "(1), they don't like me, and (2), I don't like them." His mother replied, "I'll give you two good reasons why you should go to church: (1) You're 59 years old, and (2) you're the pastor!"

My dear friends why do you come to Church? Why do you come to worship week after week? (And why did you missed it so much during Lockdown).

As we all know in 2020 the world and our own country was hit by the COVID 19 pandemic. This has challenged Church worship. Worship Services are different than we are used too. Numbers are limited. There is no hugging/ no singing/ no sitting together/ Holy Communion is received in only one kind. /no social gathering for tea after the service. Home visiting is under strict rules and regulations.

This has challenged us to reflect on why do we come to Church? Why do we worship? What is the heart of our worship? Is it out of habit, out of ritual?

Let us turn to our Gospel reading

In today's gospel, we encounter a different kind of Jesus, a Jesus whom we feel rather uncomfortable with. This Jesus IS ANGRY. Angry enough to use a whip made of cords to cleanse the temple. When we see Jesus at work, expressing his anger by driving out cattle, sheep, and doves and overturning the tables of the temple money changers; we, are rather surprised and even shocked. After all, Jesus was meek and mild, soft-spoken, kind and gentle—wasn't he? He was the one who taught us to turn the other cheek, and love even our enemies. How could he become so angry and do what he did?

This was a holy time of year, it was the Passover; and people in the temple courts were only doing what was required of them to do under Jewish law. They were buying and

selling animals for the purpose of offering God a sacrifice in the temple. It was inconvenient for them to bring their own animal sacrifices, as they were pilgrims who travelled some distance to Jerusalem for the Passover. The money changers were necessary because the people couldn't use the Roman money, which had the inscription of the emperor on it. They needed to exchange Roman money for the Jewish shekel, which was used to support the temple priests as well as the maintenance of the temple with a temple tax.

**SO WHY WAS JESUS SO ANGRY AND WHY DID HE CLEAN THE TEMPLE?
Jesus cleansed the temple BECAUSE THE PEOPLE HAD LOST THE ORIGINAL
SENSE OF WHAT THE TEMPLE WAS USE FOR. THEY HAVE LOST THEIR
SENSE OF TRUE WORSHIP. THE PEOPLE'S HEARTS WAS NOT RIGHT IN
WORSHIPPING GOD'**

You see my brothers and sisters we worship God for his love, greatness and saving grace, and to show this love to our fellow brothers and sisters.

So this act of Jesus in cleaning the temple is an act of disruption: not disrupting the events of that day in the Temple but an act of disruption that cut to the core of the historic Jewish faith and all it stood for. This is a moment of crisis: not for the dove sellers and the money-changers: This was a moment of crisis for the people of God. (COVID 19 has become a crisis for us to reflect on our worship)

Jesus was saying that the old way of doing faith, the old way of worship was no longer appropriate, that the heart of faith/worship had become lost in the ritualism, that they don't have passion for God anymore. They did not worship God for his love for his greatness for his salvation anymore—it was more to be seen by others. Jesus is confronting the people of God with a deeply uncomfortable truth: this was a moment for them to re-assess, to re-evaluate. Was it enough for them to be tied to their ritualism or did they need to find the heart of their faith once more? (*Don't get me wrong I am a committed Anglican and I love the ritualism but the question here is my hearts right*)

It's important to say, that Jesus was not opposed to Jewish tradition and not opposed to the rituals of Judaism. Jesus was a Jew, born and brought up, steeped in the law and the ways of the synagogue. And it was because he was a committed Jew that Jesus overturned the tables in the temple.

Jesus knew that true faith, true worship cannot be expressed through rituals but that the rituals we undertake must be an expression of the real worship of our lives: True worship must come from the heart and we must live it out in our daily lives through Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Faithfulness, Righteousness Justice, and Care for the vulnerable, marginalised, the poor and the sick in our communities.

If our worship does not engage with these attitudes and actions, it is not true worship

God is not only interested in beautiful worship. He is interested in pure worship that comes from the heart.

By the time Jesus visited the temple on that day, the Jewish nation had lost sight of true worship. The purity rituals had become rituals of discrimination: Jews were in the Inner Court, Gentiles in the outer court, Men in this section, Women in that section, regarding sacrifices the poor could afford, sacrifices the rich could afford. (*Does it sound familiar?*)

Jesus wanted the temple to be a place for everyone Jews and non-Jews alike. Therefore, Jesus cleansed the temple to make room for Jews the Gentiles. He came to welcome all people into God's family. ***His prophetic action in v 19 to "destroy this temple and raise it again in three days"*** points to a New Covenant, not based on animal sacrifices; not dependent on one holy building; rather, a New Covenant made effective through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection for all humankind. This is God's way of inviting, welcoming and accepting you, me, and all people into his family.

In the beauty of the ritual, the heart of purity had been lost and that had made Jesus angry and, he had to make a stand, he had to speak out he had to do something.

In a few moments as part of our worship, as part of our ritual we will be sharing in Holy Communion and we will hear the words of Christ at the Last Supper: ***"Do this in remembrance of me."***

What do/must we remember?

Remember I love you so much that I have died on the cross so that your sins may be forgiven but now you go out and show love and compassion to one another. Forgive one another. Tell your friends and neighbours the Good News of salvation. Pursue justice and mercy, protect the rights of the vulnerable. Do *that* in remembrance of him. And then the bread and the wine, which symbolise our union with Christ will be filled with meaning and this will be true faith, true worship coming from a pure heart.

CONCLUSION

My dear friends we come to church week after week as St Paul's family to worship God for his love, his greatness and his saving grace, and to show this love to our fellow brothers and sisters.

We must be sure that our worship on a Sunday is reflective of the values we hold the rest of the week. Our true worship is worked out Monday to Saturday as we care for the vulnerable and the weak and the hurting, as we share the Good News of God's love with our neighbours, as we model the forgiveness and patience of Christ within our families. That is our worship; that is the worship God requires of us.