

Reading: John 2:13-22

Let us pray:

*Loving God, you have given us the full range of emotions,
help us, like Jesus, to use them all,
and to use them for your sake. **Amen.***

Most of us, when we are honest, feel uncomfortable with anger. Especially anger directed towards us, or a situation we find ourselves in. Especially as parents, we sometimes go to our children and say, "I don't care what you're arguing about but, for goodness's sake, stop." We can find ourselves becoming peace-at-any-cost people. If we are like this, then today's Gospel is especially difficult for us. We love to sing the songs of Jesus meek and mild; the baby awakes but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes. The problem is in today's gospel, Jesus is no baby, he is neither meek nor mild, rather he is a fully grown, angry man. How then are we to understand Jesus' rage?

Before we think that Jesus is endorsing just any random act of anger and violence by overturning of the tables in the market, we need to understand what Jesus was angry at. The Gospel of John presents for us Jesus' first confrontation with the authorities. This takes place in Jerusalem and in the temple. The timing is important. It is the feast of Passover. The Passover recounts when the angel of death passed over the homes of the God's people and Moses then led those people through the Red Sea away from the oppressive Egyptians. Passover is a celebration of liberation from oppression. But what Jesus finds in the temple is not liberation, but a new form of oppression. Rather than entering a relationship with God through sacrifice, as appointed, the people are entering into a relationship with God through money. The house of the Father is no longer liberating but dishing out a new form of slavery. The high priests are hiding behind the trading taking place in the temple and are getting richer and richer. Roman coins are profane and cannot be used in the temple, so the religious leaders exchange it for temple money at a rate always to their advantage. The interests of the poor have been replaced by the interests of the rich. Jesus is especially angry with those selling doves because doves were set aside for the worship of the poor. A poor family could offer a dove as a sacrifice to God. Jesus' own parents, Mary, and Joseph were poor and offered doves. This explains why Jesus is so very annoyed, no longer can the poor afford to worship their God, worship has become just for the rich.

The question for us is not whether we get angry; anger is neutral. The question is what do we get angry about? Are we stirred with a passion when we see the poor being exploited, or has our passion been dissipated for fear of what others might think of us? St John the Gospel writer places Jesus' passionate rage at the beginning of his Gospel, so we need to grapple with it early on when reading John.

It is noteworthy how many times in the Gospels Jesus is offended by the treatment the poor receive. Another example is in Mark 12:41-44, the widow's offering. Often portrayed as Jesus honoring the gift of the widow, rather he is condemning the authorities for demanding that even a poor widow must give what she cannot afford. And in Matthew 19 Jesus encourages the rich young man to go and give money to the poor. But he goes away sad for he is very rich.

Our first reading is well known as the Ten Commandments. I was reading about one version of the Ten Commandments known as the adulterers' Bible. A careless translator of the 16th century had forgotten the word not. So, the 9th commandment reads *you shall commit adultery*. This was proving a best seller, until the printing was stopped.

The command that is spoken of most in the Gospels is: "You shall not make yourself idols, you shall not worship them or serve them."

For this age and our time, money is in danger of becoming an idol for us. It's understandable because the amount of money we have affects our life in so many ways. Our access to housing, education, medical treatment, you name it, it has a price tag on it.

Famously, and often misquoted, Paul wrote that the love of money is the root of all evil. Note he said, '**the love** of money', not, as people usually quote "money is the root of all evil". Money like anger is neutral; it's what we do with it that counts.

So how do we break the spell that money and wealth can have over us? How can we stop the poison that had overtaken the high priests and the temple of Jesus day.

There is one very strong antidote to the poison of the love of money.

The antidote to the all-consuming love of money is **generosity**. Fortunately for us, God has never forgotten to be generous. God holds nothing back but gives from an open generous hand. So much so, that God didn't even withhold his only son. In days gone by, it was common for people to give a substantial gift to the church in thanksgiving for what God had done in their life. The magnificent granite altar of Christchurch Cathedral was just such a gift. It came from a family grateful that God had brought them safely to New Zealand, their new home.

Imagine how generous we could be, if we gave gifts for every blessing we had received at God's hand. The Vicar could be paid for from the 'Thank God for My Successful Operation' fund. A youth worker could be paid from, the 'Thank God for My Grandchildren' fund." And mission to the Third World and could be paid from the 'Thank God for Paying Off My Mortgage' fund.

Are we like Jesus, fired with passionate anger at the plight of the world's poor? Does seeing the poverty of most of humanity stir us to action? The good news is that anger is okay. It is okay if it is directed for the need of another. And if the love of money threatens to

overwhelm us as it did the authorities of Jesus day, then we must try giving from a thankful and generous heart. And the spell that love of money has over us will dissipate.