



Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



Rev Alan Johnston

In Mark's gospel this morning we pick the story up just after what we have come to call the Palm Sunday procession. Jesus has just entered Jerusalem with shouts of acclamation and adulation and yet he is only one week from his crucifixion. Only one place is of interest to him as he comes in Jerusalem and that is the Holy Temple. He has only one thing it would seem on his mind and one thing that he wants to address and that is to see or indeed to confirm to himself exactly what is going on in the Temple.

We read:

¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

Whatever he saw there it must have been on his mind most of the night because the very next day they head back down the road from Bethany and into Jerusalem again. It was on this journey that we read of Jesus cursing the fig tree an issue we dealt with at the end of November.

¹⁵On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'" ¹⁸The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. ¹⁹When evening came, they went out of the city.

His mission this day in question was the Temple. He had a job to do and he wanted to get it done. Just after we have seen what some have referred to as the prelude to anger as Jesus cursed the fig tree, we now see him venting his anger in all its fullness on the traders in the Temple. Some have attempted to point their fingers at Jesus here and claim, "What is this all about, is the one who was meant to be sinless in committing sin by becoming angry and displaying it in an act of violence?"

As I am sure you know what Jesus did this day in question has been described by many as righteous anger. An anger that can be justified because it was done for all the right reasons. Hopefully as we go through this sermon it will become clearer.

I was always taught that being angry and using force is wrong. But is that correct? Can you imagine Jesus getting anywhere by going up to the moneylenders and saying: "Excuse me, fellows this is not meant to be a house of merchandise. Would you mind closing up shop and moving on!" No, he would have been laughed out of court. It needed firmer action. I don't believe Jesus was out of control but the moneychangers needed firm encouragement to leave. I believe that Jesus shows us that there are occasions when we can be angry. And there are times when we have to take physical action.

I have the utmost respect for Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Liberal theologian who felt that Hitler was so evil that he had to join the conspiracy to kill Hitler - and was executed for his part in the July 1944 plot. He prayed about whether he should take part and felt that God was calling him to join the conspirators.

As I mentioned a number of weeks ago, every Jewish male was commanded in the Law of Moses to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the week-long Passover celebration. Sometime early in the week, Jesus went to the temple. The large court around the outside of the temple is the Court of the Gentiles. It is where God-fearing Gentiles and converts to Judaism could come to pray and offer sacrifice. As Jesus made His way through the gate and into that courtyard, the sight He saw must have been unbelievable. It smelled and sounded more like a livestock auction than a temple. Men were selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others were sitting at tables exchanging money. Now the reason for all this commerce is not altogether bad. After all, Jews and God-fearing Gentiles from throughout the world had travelled to Jerusalem and they needed the bulls, sheep, and doves for sacrifices. And since there were dozens of nations and currencies represented, the money changers were doing a service by exchanging the foreign currency so that the sojourners could purchase their sacrificial animals and pay the temple tax. As I said, this is not all bad, but there are at least three problems with what they are doing, which angers Jesus.

First, the merchants are likely charging exaggerated prices. Just like when you go to the cinema and a 50p tub of popcorn costs you £4. And the money changers are likely not doing a fair exchange either. Just like if you went to a pawn shop with a £1000 ring and the broker would only offer you £100.

Second, there were plenty of other places in and around Jerusalem where these merchants and moneychangers could have set up shop. The temple was never intended to be a market place.

Third, and perhaps the most frustrating, hundreds of head of cattle and sheep and all the commerce distracts – if not prevents! – the Gentiles and the God-fearers from praying and worshipping.

So, John tells us in his gospel that Jesus made Himself a whip and began cracking that whip and crying out the Aramaic equivalents to “Go on – get out of here!” It must have been like being in Pamplona in Spain when they let the bulls run loose in the streets. Cows and sheep are running loose. People are yelling and screaming, “Help! Out of the way! The Carpenter has gone crazy!” When ever Jesus sees one of the merchants, He points the finger and says, “How dare you turn My Father’s house into a market!”... He was upset with what the temple of God had become...

Many years ago, Indian youths would go away in solitude to prepare for manhood. One such youth hiked into a beautiful valley, green with trees, bright with flowers. There he fasted. But on the third day, as he looked up at the surrounding mountains, he noticed one tall rugged peak, capped with dazzling snow. I will test myself against that mountain, he thought. He put on his buffalo-hide shirt, threw his blanket over his shoulders and set off to climb the peak. When he reached the top he stood on the rim of the world. He could see forever, and his heart swelled with pride. Then he heard a rustle at his feet, and looking down, he saw a snake. Before he could move, the snake spoke. "I am about to die," said the snake. "It is too cold for me up here and I am freezing. There is no food and

I am starving. Put me under your shirt and take me down to the valley." "No," said the youth. "I am forewarned. I know your kind. You are a rattlesnake. If I pick you up, you will bite, and your bite will kill me." "Not so," said the snake. "I will treat you differently. If you do this for me, you will be special. I will not harm you."

The youth resisted awhile, but this was a very persuasive snake with beautiful markings. At last the youth tucked it under his shirt and carried it down to the valley. There he laid it gently on the grass, when suddenly the snake coiled, rattled, and leapt, biting him on the leg. "But you promised..." cried the youth. "You knew what I was when you picked me up." Said the snake as it slithered away."

1 Corinthians 6 verses 19-20:

¹⁹Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

The Old Testament Temple was only 30' wide by 90' long - a mere 2700 square feet. It was smaller than many homes today. It has been estimated that to rebuild the Temple by the directions in the Bible would cost today about two billion pounds! It would take incredible amounts of gold, expensive wood and tapestries, and the finest stone. It was the most expensive building per square foot ever built. The Queen of Sheba saw it and swooned.

And now, we have become the dwelling place of God!! We are of great value to God as the place where His Spirit takes up residence... What snakes have you allowed to slither into your life in the last year? What poison is in your body even now that is killing you? Not necessarily killing you physically but killing you spiritually? Perhaps your family life is suffering because of it... Your business life... Your marriage... Your finances...

What has the temple of God become for you? A place of deceit and sin, a place where you pretend all is well when in fact all is corrupt? Today is the 1st day of the New Year, 2006 – praise the Lord that he has seen us this far! But this is traditionally a time when we all make new year resolutions and plans for the year that lies ahead of us. But today could be so much more than this for you. This could be the day when you allow Jesus Christ into the temple of your soul. This could be the day you decide that you have been keeping him at arms distance for too long and now is the right time to let him in. Now be warned if you let Jesus in, he will come in and will bring changes! Changes which you know if you are honest have been a long time in coming but which you know you need to make.

What a brilliant way to start the New Year off! Surrendering to Jesus Christ and asking him in to sort things out. Asking him to be ruthless with your private life, your finances, your service to him and his kingdom, your love for others especially to those who belong to the family of believers, the list just goes on and on and you and only you know the areas of your life that need sorted out.

God says to us, through Isaiah this morning in Isaiah chapter 1 verse 13:

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations - I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in

prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow. "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword." For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

For this to happen we need to let Jesus into the Temple that is our soul. He won't kick the door down, he won't force it, he isn't going to pick the lock to get in! He is simply standing at the door of your life and he is knocking...

Revelation chapter 3 verse 20:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

I know many folk here who have opened that door to Jesus but I also know some who as yet haven't... What is stopping you?

Is it because you are ashamed with what has been going on in your life in this last year? God knows what we have been doing, and what has been going on in our lives and we know that he knows. And many times when he knocks we know he wants to fix something gone wrong and we will not answer the door. When we confess things and let God's light shine in, it cleans it up and always makes it better. But for some, they won't open the door because they know he wants us to stop some things.

Listen! Listen closely!

Can you feel the tug of the Holy Spirit?

Can you sense the closeness of the Lord Jesus Christ this morning?

Can you see Him in your mind's eye as He stands before you, gently knocking, and then reaching out to you with those nail-scarred hands of love?

Will you open the door of your soul right now and let Him come in?

Don't make Him wait any longer.

Don't keep the door shut!

The only things that Jesus wants from you are your sin, your worry, your hopelessness, your disappointments, your failed dreams, your wasted years, your sickness, your weakness and your pain!

Why not give Him those things this morning and then let Him fill those empty and clean places in your heart with His love and His blessings?

This the time and this is the day to decide whether you will hear and open your heart to Him!

Jesus is knocking right now!

What will your answer be?

1st January 2006 – Mark Ch11 v 12-35 part 2

But listen before we close this service a word of caution to all those who once upon a time invited Jesus into their lives and have let things slip. This same Jesus who reigns in glory, is his holy spirit living in a slum in your life because although you once made a profession of faith you have not as yet followed through on all the promises that you made.

Perhaps you are doing things you know are wrong.

Perhaps you are somehow explaining it all away to yourself when in fact you are fooling no one – least of all God.

Let Jesus in, this New Years day, to do a stock take of how things in your life are and let him start a fresh with you as you face this new year – with Jesus in our lives this New Year we can confidently say “Out with the old, and in with the new!”

Lets pray together.