

### “Takin’ Care of Business”

I am sure that we all have experienced the situation of hearing someone recount an incident that we are privy to. As they go along we start to wonder about certain details that the teller is relating. We think how we would have told the story. We each have details that are not quite the same. That seems to be the case with today’s Gospel.

In the Synoptic Gospels—Mark, Matthew, and Luke—the cleansing of the Temple comes after Jesus enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. As those three gospels paint it, the driving out of the money changers is the act that precipitates the final plot to arrest and kill Jesus. It makes sense in the way their narratives are constructed. John however, uses this action as the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. This is not the only part of John that is different from the other Gospels but it is one of the most striking, and for John’s telling of the gospel it makes sense in this place.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus accuses the moneychangers and animal sellers of being robbers. He accuses them of charging too much for the transactions or gouging on the cost of sacrificial animals. Here Jesus seems most concerned that they have turned the Temple, God’s house, into an emporium or marketplace.

Regardless of the concern this is not the Jesus we are used to. This is not the Jesus of the movies who is slender with flowing hair like a peacenik from the 60s with a sophisticated English accent. It is not the soft focus Jesus of greeting cards. This is not the Jesus of Sunday School stories who calls children to his side. Nor is this the Jesus of miraculous healings, compelling parables, and captivating sermons. This Jesus is tough and angry.

We must remember that Jesus was a human being and therefore subject to all of the emotions of a human being. Whether the action shows up to inaugurate his ministry as here in John, or during Holy Week as in the other three Gospels, it is part of who Jesus is. At least one aspect of his personality is that of an Old Testament prophet who rails against the failures of the people. He is like Jeremiah who calls out to the people of Jerusalem condemning them for the failure to follow God’s commandments. He is like John the Baptist who calls his listeners a brood of vipers.

Sixteenth Century theologian and protestant reformer John Calvin wrote that Jesus had three essential characteristics—prophet, priest and king. It seems of late the church has emphasized Jesus as priest. That is one who preaches, teaches and provides pastoral care. We sing, “What a friend we have in Jesus,” or Jesus walks with us in the garden. These are all images of Jesus who is gentle and kind, and honestly not very demanding.

The prophetic Jesus demands a lot of us. He reminds us that the path of discipleship is not easy. He tells us, as we heard in last week’s lesson, “If any

want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”<sup>1</sup> This is not an invitation to a tea party. This is a call to the hard work of discipleship.

There is more to this relationship than us receiving comfort. We need to take our part in it. Our part includes the hard work of ministry. It includes serving people we think are undeserving. It means learning that those we perceive as undeserving have as much of the Imago Dei, the image of God, as we do. It means sacrificing our wants to provide for the needs of others a world away. It means giving up Sunday morning coffee and a leisurely read of the newspaper for time spent in worship of our life giving and life sustaining God. It means giving to the ministry of the church when we want, not need, a new coat, a remodeling of our kitchen, or a vacation in the Tuscan hills.

If we are going to take care of the business of being disciples, we need to attend to it with as much determination and care as we would a new job or a new love. Our passions are many and varied. Jesus’ passion was the love of God which led to the Passion of the cross.

The good news is that there is no time like the present for us to stir our souls, refocus our minds, and prioritize that to which Jesus calls us. We have that opportunity this Lent to reorder and remake ourselves. Let Jesus overturn the business as usual that has overtaken our life, and drive out the cares and desires of a distracted heart. Let us create a Temple of the Holy Spirit in your soul.

Let our hearts burn with a passion for God’s kingdom where all are free from the fetters of circumstance, where everyone has their needs met, and where all are treated as beloved children of God whose love and care for us is even more ferocious and fierce than that of a mama bear’s for her cubs. This passionate, disruptive Jesus is as much Jesus as is the friendly and kind one. Latch on to that passion in him and let it stoke the fires of passion in you for the fulfilling of God’s will for this world and for every person in it. That is a fitting use of Lent this year and every year as long as we have the breath to say “Amen.”

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 8:34 NRSV