

Turning the tables - Lent 3

All Four gospels record the cleansing of the Temple. Matt, Mark and Luke place this event towards the end of Jesus' ministry (after the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem). John places the cleansing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, after the first miracle at Cana.

The "temple" of our text was not the first temple, built by Solomon (see [1 Kings 6-7](#)), nor the second temple, rebuilt by the Jews returning from their Babylonian captivity ([Ezra 6:15](#)). It was the third temple, known as 'Herod's Temple' built by Herod around 19BC.

In His early infancy, Jesus had been taken to the temple in Jerusalem for His purification, and there both Simeon and Anna worshipped Him as the promised Messiah ([Luke 2:21-38](#)). When Jesus was 12 years of age, He accompanied His parents to Jerusalem, where He absolutely amazed them and others.

Jesus attitude to the temple: He had great respect for it

- It was His father's house- "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49).
- It was holy- a place of worship, he taught on several occasions in the temple because it was sanctified by God who dwelt in it.

Scandal in the temple: The "temple" Jesus finds in John 2 seems to have greatly changed, and thus the need for its cleansing. The temple is being abused, and Jesus rightly responds to such abuse.

Context: The Passover feast attracted so many people to come to Jerusalem. These worshippers would have to pay the half-shekel temple tax in the coinage of the temple, and thus foreign monies were unacceptable and had to be exchanged for the proper coins. Also, they had to offer their sacrifices, and for many of these travellers, the only solution was to buy a sacrificial animal there in Jerusalem.

Market stalls... set up outer court of the temple, court of the gentiles

the money-changers gave the worshippers lawful, Jewish coins in exchange for foreign currency. Some NT scholars think there could have been a syndicate by the temple priests conniving with sellers to sell on inflated prices- if you brought your own animal it would be rejected.

Jesus Turning the tables- (Why? Has He gone mad? What's wrong?)

Jesus rebelling against the abusive practices at the temple courts. He was in protest of the commercialisation of temple? Jesus was challenging corrupt practice happening.

Jesus disturbs the status quo.

The image of tables and money changers: in our own time we see tables that display hatred, injustice and discrimination. Tables that display acts of modern slavery, terrorism and abuse of human dignity. Shall we turn a blind eye and keep quiet?

Bonhoeffer: “Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”

Action: We should allow Christ to overturn the tables that display pride and selfishness and the non-caring attitude for others in our hearts. We are called to Overturn the tables of all forms of injustices in our societies and the world. And so, we pray with **Francis Drake:** “Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves”.

CONFRONTATION

The cleansing provoked the anger of the religious leaders. They ask Jesus to validate his authority, and demand for a sign: expecting that like Moses and Aaron did before the Israelites, he would be able to perform “signs and wonders” that authenticate him as God’s representative (Exodus 4:29-31). If He is acting with God’s authority, let Him perform a sign to prove it.

Instead, He speaks to them of the “ultimate sign,” His death and resurrection: **“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again”** (verse 19). They assume Jesus is referring to Herod’s temple, a temple which has been under construction for **“forty-six years.”**

But Jesus is not speaking of that earthly temple; rather He is speaking of Himself as the temple of God, and of His coming crucifixion and resurrection. May we hold our faith in Christ as we hope to be raised up with Him at the end of life. **Amen.**