

Lent 3: Reflection: Godly Foolishness ([John 2:13-22](#) and [1 Corinthians 1:18-25](#))

Have you ever thought that for many people, the Christian faith, and indeed Jesus himself, are very strange?

The death of Jesus on the cross is, according to Old Testament scripture, an absolute scandal. Deuteronomy 21:23 says that “anyone hung on a tree is under God’s curse.” So how can something which is so awful in God’s eyes be a good thing? How can someone who dies in such an appalling way be gloriously raised from the dead and then taken into heaven? How is that good news for the world through the ages? It is paradoxical that someone put to death in a way which means that they are under God’s curse can be the very same person who opens the way for us to be right with God forever. The redeeming power of Jesus’ death makes no sense!

Jesus’ life also presents us with some very strange and disturbing moments, such as this one in the Temple at Jerusalem, where Jesus enters and turns on the money-exchangers and those selling animals for sacrifice. Only a few weeks ago, we were looking at the Presentation of Christ in the Temple; it is more than likely that Jesus’ parents would have been amongst those who used the traders to exchange their “street money” for Temple coinage, who looked at the animals ready to purchase for the sacrifice they had to make to redeem their firstborn son, and perhaps winced at the cost of a couple of pigeons, the most that they could afford.

This scene would have been the stuff of life. The Temple was the place which mingled God’s very presence with the history and customs of the Jewish people, a palace for God which had been rebuilt nearly fifty years ago and which, with its beautiful outer courts and inner sanctum, would have looked like it was set to last for ever. And yes, maybe some of those traders were charging extortionate rates, but that was the way of things. Such dealings must have gone through “on the nod” from the Temple authorities.



With that in mind, picture the impact of Jesus coming into the Temple courts and being consumed with jealous fury at what he sees. He makes a whip out of cords: imagine the sound as it cracks in the air, cracks on the knuckles of the traders, cracks on the bird cages, on the flanks of the cattle and sheep. Imagine the outraged shouts from those who he drives out, fumbling for their scattered coins and best livestock, the bellowing and

bleating, feathers everywhere, the crash of tables as they hit the floor. Utter chaos. It might look quite comical if it wasn't so outrageous.

Imagine the Temple guards asking, "What are you doing? Are you mad? What gives you the right to come and disturb the peace?" That strange, disturbing man, overturning everything that was familiar; on whose authority? He does so not with a polite "Traders, would you mind moving along?" or by sitting down to engage in debate or to share a parable, but by hurling everything in the air and out.

Jesus didn't want to allow the customs which had developed to remain. Many people might have thought, "But we're OK the way we are!" They were performing the "form" of worship correctly. Where was the harm?

The whole point of his outrage was that the forms of worship had become just that; empty shells of show which exploited and dragged down the poor and those who were coming in faith to worship God.

Jesus' response to his questioners is also strange: 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' That little word "this" would make them think that he was referring to the building in which they were standing. It's only after Jesus' death that the real significance of what he meant is clear.

Jesus was full of jealous, zealous love for his Father God. He was uncompromising in his behaviour. That love upset and offended others and would not simply "rub along" with the traders' sharp practices and the lack of love for God he encountered in the Temple.

Yet that love and his own sacrificial death and resurrection does not sit easily with everyone, even to this very day. It is unsettling in its very passion, its intensity, its willingness to embrace the disgrace of death on the cross. What's even more strange, is that he chose to follow this path – for the very people who questioned, mocked and reviled him.

What about us? Do we seek to be faithful and passionate in our love for God, in the integrity of our behaviour towards others and our world, even when that looks utterly strange to others? Do we rejoice in the apparent foolishness of the cross? Our Lenten journey gives us the space to reflect on how we too can be distinctive. Let us ask for courage to embrace this challenge.

The Collect for the Third Sunday of Lent

Eternal God
give us insight to discern your will for us,
to give up what harms us,
and to seek the perfection we are promised
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Revd Vicky Barrett