

Dean's Letter, 4 March 2018

Dear Cathedral family

Our Gospel reading for this morning, John 2:13-22 – the cleansing of the temple – is an interesting picture of Jesus. Not – this time – Jesus the healer, or Jesus at prayer, or Jesus teaching the disciples. Nor is this Jesus the compassionate. Instead, this is Jesus the protester, outraged at the abuse of the sacred space of the temple, angered by what had been allowed to creep into the place of worship. What, we might ask, was the problem? Why did Jesus take the action he did? It is not immediately clear.

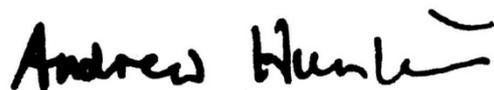
From what we know, those who were selling and trading in the temple were there legally. Only temple coinage could be used for purchases, so there were money changers to change the many different currencies into one standard unit. There was also the matter of holiness, purity: Gentile coinage could not be used to purchase animals for sacrifice. Otherwise the temple would be defiled. So perhaps Jesus was protesting against the exclusive nature of the Jewish religion. And perhaps there was cheating on the weights, the measures, and the traders were getting rich on the backs of those who came to worship. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus says, "You have made the house of God a den of robbers!" (Mark 11:17) – instead of a house of prayer for all nations.

Jesus regarded the temple practices as corrupt and under God's judgement. Hence his confrontational action of protest! And, in John's Gospel, he points to the true Temple – himself. "He is the word made flesh, the place where the glory of God has chosen to make his dwelling...He is the reality to which the Temple itself points."

This is not a judgement on St George's Fair, or pledging, or the collection we take in church each Sunday! Rather, it invites us to take a careful look at any practice that exploits people's vulnerability in the name of religion; and any practice within the life of faith and worship that is an abuse of power. The recent murders of policemen at Ngcobo police station, and the subsequent action by police which resulted in seven people being killed at the headquarters of the cult believed to be responsible for the attack on the police station, are all fresh in our minds. It is sobering that this group calls themselves a church – part of the body of Christ. But their actions and way of life bear no resemblance to the life of Christ to which we are called. Yet how vulnerable are some, it would seem, to spiritual manipulation and abuse of power. It is very sobering.

This is one reason why our Annual Vestry is so important. We are transparent, we are committed to good governance in the life of the church, we have nothing to hide. And we are committed to a way of life that brings freedom – not to do as we please, but rather freedom that comes with order and respect for others, which is the point of the Ten Commandments (our Old Testament reading). Let's be part of building up the life of the church, the body of Christ.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.