

*“...Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple...he also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables...”*

✠ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN

What’s happening here - the wrathful Jesus? Is this the tantrum of a small child? Has the Monopoly board been upended because the game is not going to plan and the righteous Jesus is not winning the game!

So often in this little life of ours, we walk away because things are just not going our way so we change jobs, we change friends, we change husband / wives / partners, we change parishes or even churches we - “get the hump!” And we never again speak to that person or these people again or we simply close off that particular compartment of our lives and “move on” as if it never happened... and it’s never spoken of again.

Is this sort of human response what was happening here? Or was it a display to teach, to make a point - the sacrament of anger - “His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me” ”

The Jews were certainly tuned into this notion of ‘anger display’ - “What sign can you show us for doing this”

And Jesus’ response was appropriate to the moment and indeed the thinking that brought this question about signs -

“Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up”

And so they respond - “This temple has been under construction for 46 years, and you will raise it up in three days?”

But here the discussion ends and John interpolates and explains that Jesus was speaking of another temple - the temple of his own body! Certainly they would neither have comprehended nor agreed with that explanation!

Interestingly in this matter of *the temple* (in predicting its destruction) and also in St John’s inclusion of the “cleansing of the temple” in the first place, he accords with the synoptic gospels and St Mark in particular - St Mark 11:11 which records this temple incident and St Mark 14:58 which records the prediction of the temple’s destruction.

However unlike the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus made a whip of cords with which he drove them out - suggesting greater force and threat to the money-changers. St John also quotes -

Psalm 69:9

“Zeal for your house has eaten me up:  
And the taunts of those who taunt you have fallen on me”  
This Psalm was of course commonly used in the early church’s Passion apologetics.

The statement that the incident took place when the temple had been 46 years in its building points to the date 28 AD which indicates that St John locates this pivotal incident at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in stark contrast to the Synoptics who locate this event as part of the journey of what we call Holy Week.

Is John making it clear that Jesus was “laying his cards on the table” over-against the religious establishment from the very

beginning of his ministry? And of course it is John who spells out what we now take for granted that the statement about the destruction of the temple on the one hand was also a statement about his own body that would be “raised up” in three days!

John’s shift in this dramatic event to the very beginning of the ministry makes it clear from the outset that Jesus ministry was a total clash of religious culture and that the destruction of the temple stood for the end of the Jewish dispensation and its worship - which is the ultimate purpose of the whole ministry of Jesus!

The old order of worship is to be replaced by a new one - an order no longer focused on the old temple, but on the body of Christ - but in what sense?

Is it the ecclesial body in the Pauline sense? Or is it the glorified humanity of Christ?

The second seems closer to the theology of St John however we cannot rule out the Pauline sense - especially as more and more the church has come to understand that it is the people of God rather than a temple of stone yet like the old dispensation looking to Jerusalem - we look to Canterbury or Rome or Constantinople and we also make pilgrimage in search of the one who said -

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”

Implicit in this prediction and clear statement from Jesus is the mystery of the Cross and the sublime mystery that this event would unexpectedly be the turning point of the new dispensation.

While the Exodus account of the giving of the 10 Commandments read this morning in a very real sense represents what Jesus came to overthrow when he *overturned* the tables in the temple - I am reminded that he also said in St Matthew 5:17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished....

And I am also reminded that in the 1662 Rite of the Book of Common Prayer that the 10 Commandments were read as part of the Introductory Rite at the Liturgy and indeed that spiritual directors would direct penitents to read the Commandments as part of their preparation for the Sacrament of Confession...

Yet Jesus was in conflict with what had been done to the revelation by its custodians - indeed zeal for God's house may well consume Christ as he beholds what the religious establishment of this time and place have done.

And like the Jews who demand signs and the Greeks who desire wisdom the establishment of the church today might well also suffer from the whip of cords of Christ's zeal... the vanity of those who at times narcissistically lead may yet have to learn that God's apparent foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's apparent weakness is stronger than human strength.