

Lent 3 Year B
John 2:13-25
Rev. Carol Rodin

What does Jesus observe in the temple courtyard that day, that makes him act so uncharacteristically?

300 to 400 thousand disciples are streaming into Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. The Vatican, which was modeled after Herod the Great's second temple, is similar in size, it receives up to 20,000 visitors a day. So that gives us some idea of the huge crowds, the noise, the chaos that Jesus experienced in the temple that day.

Jesus stood in the court of the gentiles and studied the temple scene and became angry.

In John's telling of the story, he makes a whip of cords before he does anything else. He doesn't buy one, or borrow one or even find one lying on the ground, he searches for and finds materials, sits down somewhere and engages in the action of creating something for his purposes.

What was he thinking about as he wove his whip together?

The making of the thing gave him time to think through his plan of action. What follows then isn't Jesus flying off the handle in a fit of rage, put a pre-meditated plan.

He stands up, takes out his whip and clears out the place. Then the chaos and noise is reduced to a big empty space. The temple is not the same as it was before his arrival.

Jesus has just cleaned house in a way that surprises and grabs our attention. It represents a moment of promise for renewal and change in the church.

It's easy at this point to see his actions only as a condemnation of the corrupt temple authorities in cahoots with the Roman government that Eric talked about last week. Throw the bums out and all will be well.

But what if we turn it around and ask ourselves how it might apply to our understanding of the church today? What role do we play in deciding what it means to be church in a rapidly changing world where the old ways of doing things are giving way to new ways that have implications for how we live in community.

Are we, like the money changers and the merchants in the temple going along with the status quo, doing church the way we've always experienced it, simply because this is the way we've always done it, all the while ignoring the way the world is changing around us? How do we evaluate what is essential to Christian life and practice and what needs renewal?

The understanding Jesus has of church seems to be drastically different from the Jews who were with him that day. When they question his authority and ask for a sign he tells them "Tear down the temple, and in three days I'll raise it up."

Jesus suggests a new way to be church. It was revolutionary in his time, but still applicable in ours.

Instead of a church built up as a grandiose structure to impress, intimidate and maintain its political power, the power of the church is transformed through the Resurrection of Christ's body into something much greater.

Through his resurrection we are transformed into Christ's own body, a body of believers whose collective power dwarfs even Herod the Great's temple.

While Lent is a time for personal examination and repentance, it is also a time for communal examination and repentance. A time to ask ourselves, what does it mean to be the church?

Our traditions and customs comfort, cradle and strengthen us, but do they lull us to sleep and prevent us from making meaningful transformative changes? Are we offering a place to grow, rebuild, and transform lives and communities?

The Bishop's book for Lent is "Now You See It, How technology and brain science will transform schools and business for the 21st century" by Cathy N. Davidson

According to the book, our current information age is one of four times in all of human history when the terms of human communication and interaction have been fundamentally changed.

The first was with the invention of writing in 4000 BC, next is the invention of moveable type in 10th century China and 15th century Germany.

The third is the invention of mass printing and machine produced paper and ink at the end of the 18th century during the enlightenment.

We're now living in that fourth age, an age of unprecedented global communication and information sharing.

In her preface Davidson describes what she sees as a restrictive factor in creating positive change in this new age as a kind of attention blindness.

We are trained to interact in a way that is designed to uphold the structure of the industrial age that we have moved out of.

This results in a kind of blindness to the possibilities of solutions to problems in a new information age. In the past our ability to play by the rules in a systematic fashion was critical, training for a specific job was the norm. Now our ability to adapt and change holds a higher premium.

She writes “Because of attention blindness we often arrive at a standstill when it comes to tackling important issues, not because the other side is wrong, but because both sides are precisely right in what they see, but neither can see what the other does”

How can we create opportunities to see what the other sees?

Most of you know by now that Pastor Emilio Benitez will be moving on from Resurreccion this spring. Resurreccion’s leadership is taking on new responsibility and developing new leadership skills. While this is a moment to celebrate and hope for positive change, it is also an opportunity to reflect on what we have learned together.

Emilio has served as a kind of cultural interpreter for the church. His life has been drastically different from most of ours. I asked him once what was hard for him about American mainstream culture. I wanted to hear what he could see from his perspective that I could not see. He observed that Americans have difficulty accepting responsibility when they have done something wrong. He notices that in our culture, if an apology comes, it usually comes alongside an explanation that rationalizes the action, that softens or eliminates the need for true repentance.

A different perspective like his offers us true grist for the mill, an opportunity to raise our awareness of how our culture blinds us to things we would benefit from seeing.

In this case, if we can’t truly repent, what opportunity is there of reconciliation? Or for growth? Has our culture taught us that we can never let our guard down, that being right all the time is essential for our survival?

How might this idea of shared perspectives help us to decide what needs tearing down and chasing out in our institutional church? Does what we do come only from what the church sanctions, from what is traditional and allowed... or are our actions here a result of our deep convictions and beliefs?

Do we leave sufficient space for new perspectives? How do we greet change? With anger and fear or with hope and courage grounded in scripture and our convictions?

Next Saturday we'll take some time for some deliberate discernment about how Total Common Ministry is working at Christ Church. If you haven't done so yet, I hope you'll sit down with the questions that were mailed to you last week and spend some time in prayer and reflection.

How are your needs being met with the total common ministry model?

How has your spiritual life changed since you became involved at Christ Church?

What ministries do you see working well?

What suggestions can you see for how we might do things differently within the TCM framework?

How might we be more effective in serving in faith and community?

Would you like a place to discern your gifts and baptismal calling?

What do you see as the future of Christ Church?

In all the other gospels, the story of Jesus chasing out the money changers comes at the end of Jesus' life. In contrast, John places it just after the wedding at Cana, in the very beginning of his public ministry.

Jesus, standing in the immense courtyard of the temple, at the outset of his public ministry seems to be challenging us to entertain this question: How can we create something new that honors the ancient dream of God's purpose for the church in the world?