

St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall

Scottish Charity SCO 05322/CCL No 119086

[St Magnus Cathedral Facebook page](#)

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Welcome to St Magnus Cathedral this morning. It was founded in 1137 by St Rognvald, in honour of Magnus, his uncle. The Cathedral belongs to the people of Orkney and its doors are open to all. If you are a visitor, we hope this order of service will help you feel part of our worship together.

You can find our Sunday worship

[here on Facebook](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/StMagnusCathedralCongregation/>

or [on YouTube here](#)

Join our Wednesday ZOOM meditation by signing up here.

stmagnuszoom@gmail.com

Candle Lighting and opening meditation

We light this Candle to light our way as we journey to Jerusalem, the cross, and the tomb.

May it's light strengthen us where the road is hard, embolden us when our hearts lose courage, and bring hope as the road grows dark.

This is the path of life, among the shadows of the world, finding the moments of hope, amid the rising of the cross.

May our hands cup the grain, our lives bear the faith, our souls grip the truth, our hearts trust the promise.

May God's steadfast love be our travelling companion.

May we enjoy a lifetime seeking God, who does not hide from us, but lives with us through all suffering, and bears us into wholeness.

May God's presence always be our travelling companion.

May we move out onto the way and with truth and righteousness, celebrate our living in God, in every place around and within.

May the cry of heaven always be our travelling companion.

Reading John 2:13-20

Since it was almost the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the Temple, he found people selling cattle, sheep and pigeons, while moneychangers sat at their counters. Making a whip out of cords, Jesus drove them all out of the Temple—even the cattle and sheep—and overturned the tables of the money changers, scattering their coins. Then he faced the pigeon sellers: "Take all this out of here! Stop turning God's house into a market!" The disciples remembered the words of scripture: "Zeal for your house consumes me." The Temple authorities intervened and said, "What sign can you show us to justify what you've done?" Jesus answered, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." They retorted, "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you're going to raise it up in three days?"

Reflection

WHEN CRITICISM IS JUST NOT GOOD NEWS

The so-called 'temple incident' by the storyteller we call John, comes near the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. It also marks the beginning of the so-called 'opposition' by several Jewish leaders.

I mention this some-what bland statement because when we compare John's story with the other gospel stories, they have placed this or a similar story at different stages of Jesus' encounter with the people and/or leaders.

Matthew, following the storyteller Mark, has a similar story, but occurring after what we normally call 'Palm Sunday'.

That is, just before Jesus' final encounter with some of the leaders. The consensus among serious biblical scholars is that Jesus did speak some word against the temple or temple practices, they were sceptical that the evangelists preserved his words.

Where Matthew, Mark, and Luke say Jesus' reason for driving out the merchants is because they are making the temple 'a den of robbers'

- implying the main problem is a moral one concerning unfair business practices...

John says the merchants are making '...God's house into a market' - implying the main problem is a spiritual one concerning the profaning of holy space.

So what was John's purpose in telling this story and placing it at the beginning of Jesus' activities?

I think a simple answer is:

John uses this story to flag the suggestion that

Jesus' criticism is going to get him into serious trouble.

And the rest of his story or stories is just about why and how.

Why? Because Jesus has tackled the authorities head on.

And he has challenged them in their seat of power and authority: the temple. So, John seems to be saying, as you listen to this story, remember this clue I have given you. Jesus life and teaching is about challenging and reinterpreting authority and living. And the violence done to one of those living, who dared to criticise.

Then this more complicated theological answer. The temple will be 'cleansed', ultimately, not by being cleared of merchants, but by being re-imagined as a sign of the promise of 'new life'.

I think there can be little doubt that according to the storyteller we call John, Jesus was a protester. His 'protest' was against a religious and social system that discriminated against and excluded the majority of ordinary people. And his particular 'protest' this time was that ordinary people were being cheated at the point or place in their life where they were most vulnerable and where they should have been nurtured.

So there is nothing 'sweet' or 'sentimental' in John's story.

No Charles Wesley sentimental 18th century 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' here.

Nor is there any way to talk around Jesus' behaviour that modifies or explains away that one emotion many continue to have such difficulty with: protested anger.

Yet not to get angry at times is to be Pollyanna.

When asked what church Jesus would attend if living in today's world, the writer John Dominic Crossan's response was that he was not sure.

But he then added that, which ever church Jesus attended, he was bound to get into trouble with the leadership!

On another occasion Crossan was the keynote speaker at a weekend seminar.

He had given the opening lecture on the Friday evening and was about to give another on the Saturday, when a student from the local conservative theological college said to him, 'I told my professor that I was coming to hear you [today].' And my professor said to me, 'You're going to hear Crossan!?!? Why, why he's to the left of Borg!' [another oft quoted writer]

So Crossan said to the student, 'Please give my best regards to your professor. And tell him that the real problem is that both Borg and Crossan are to the right of Jesus. And rumour has it that Jesus is to the right of God'.

If we can work our way through all the layers of myth John the storyteller has attached to his Jesus, then I am prepared to speculate that what we have left is, some temple leaders did not see Jesus' community renewal suggestions, or hear his criticism, as good news!

He was bound to get into trouble with the leadership. And living all his life in Galilee, Jesus probably underestimated the power of the temple leaders, hand-in-hand with the Roman Emperor's representative.

As a result, the outcome of Jesus' decision to mount a defiant symbolic demonstration in Jerusalem, would be unexpectedly tragic and violent. Jesus was in "their space and their challenge reflects their privileged status".

And so, the cross became the symbol both of Roman violence and much later, of the faith of those who dared to resist its inevitability.

So what, for us living in the 21st century. And trying to remember this is Lent and what that might mean for us, personally, at this moment in time?

- In what ways do we deaden ourselves to the Spirit's presence by focusing only on immediate demands and desires?

- In what ways do we refuse Jesus's aims for greater goods in our lives by looking only to our own interests?
- If Jesus were to cleanse the temples of our lives, what would that be like for us?

Perhaps we all could ponder those questions some more during the coming week!

Prayer
Rosemary Moon

All seeing and all giving God, we have so much to pray about and yet, so often, we simply don't know how to pray, to express all that we feel in our hearts. But we bring our prayers to you now, knowing that you love and will hear us.

Abba God, we thank you for our community built on the worship of those who come week by week to this Cathedral, welcoming those who join us from near and far. We reach out to all around us for their loving support as we try to make the faith that we share relevant to this era, and the struggle to hold on to truth, kindness and respect. We thank you Abba for these beautiful islands and for all they mean to us who live here and those who visit. We cherish the opportunities here for work, for meaningful and creative leisure and for volunteering to make the lives of others easier. And we thank you for those that we love most, for the happiness and worries that they bring us and especially for those who share our deepest and most intimate emotions.

Mother God, we need your loving purpose and courage to help us to be the change that we want to see in this fractured and struggling world. We need to make our protest against war and suffering felt, to call out those who perpetrate the corruption of truth; the desecration of other human beings and of our fragile, living world. We pray for courage for the peoples of Ukraine and Gaza and for all those innocently caught up in wars everywhere, including those made to fight for what they know is wrong. We pray for political leadership that is for the common good and not for individual gain or reputation. For a system which supports the most vulnerable instead of cheating them of their self-respect.

Jesus protested his anger and we ask you, God of Justice and Truth, for the courage to cleanse and re-interpret our own lives, with all their

opportunities, to call out the injustices around us, and to work for the common good. Amen

Blessing

Go now as those who would see not only what the world is but what we can make it be, and may your hands, your heart, your voice be turned toward making it so.

Go in peace.

May you stay safe in the Way of Christ, and may you be blessed by his Spirit this day and always.