

## **Introduction to the Third Sunday of Lent 2021**

Good morning everyone and welcome to this zoom service on the third Sunday of Lent. As we journey to the crucifixion, followed by the wonder of Easter. In our first reading from 1 Corinthians 1: 18 – 25 we will hear that the message of the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews as they were expecting a triumphant, political Messiah, not a humble itinerant preacher. Greeks and Romans were sure that no reputable person would be crucified, so it was unthinkable that a crucified criminal could be the Saviour.

In our gospel reading we hear that Jesus drove the merchants out of the Temple and this might be a good time for us to ask ourselves is there anything in our lives that might be driven from the everyday to bring us closer to him?

## **John 2. 13 – 22 Jesus in the Temple**

It was Passover and the Temple was the beating heart of Judaism. It was the centre of worship and music, of politics and society, of national celebration and mourning. It was also the place

where you would find more animals (alive and dead) than anywhere else. Above all else it was the place where Israel's God, YHWH, had promised his people he would minister to them. It was designed with one courtyard inside another. At the centre was the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could go. Around that was the Sanctuary for the other priests: then came the Court of the Jews; then the Court of the Women. Around the outside, the Court of the Gentiles was the only place where non- Jews could go – and the Gentiles could not get in for cows and sheep and money changers. And this was where the then unknown prophet from Galilee came in and turned everything upside down.

In Mark's Gospel he reports that Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations." It was this that made Jesus so angry: by their false nationalism, the Jewish authorities only considered the needs of Jews who were at the Temple making sacrifice. The idea behind the purchasing of a sacrifice was thought as a way towards God, and the Jews believed that so long

as they made a sacrifice to God, they could continue to live lives of oppression and injustice they never thought about the needs of the non - Jews. It clearly demonstrates as to what Jesus thinks of the Temple; he regards it as corrupt, and under God's judgement. The marketplace atmosphere is not what the Temple was supposed to be there for.

John wants us to understand what Jesus did in the Temple is a hint at the new meaning he is giving to Passover. This will be important for the other Passover moments we will read in chapter 6 and the final scenes which begin in chapter 12 of John's Gospel. That he is the true Temple: he is the Word made flesh, the place where the glory of God has chosen to make his dwelling. The Jews had ancient traditions about the Temple being destroyed and rebuilt. It had happened before, and some thought it would happen again. Herod the Great had begun a programme of rebuilding the Temple, and now, forty – six years later, one of his sons was completing it. Jesus takes the sacrificial traditions and applies them to himself as the lamb of God He is the reality to which the

Temple itself points. His death and resurrection three days later will be the reality to which the whole Passover celebration points.

God called Abraham to be a blessing to all nations. The Prophets of old foresaw foreigners coming to worship in Jerusalem. There is no place in God's plan for narrow nationalism. God calls us to share with others what we have learnt about his love. The Jewish religion taught that you only enter the kingdom by slavish obedience to the Jewish law. But Jesus said, "All you need is love," Jesus died on the cross for challenging the nationalism of his fellow Jews. St Paul said that faith was the way into the kingdom to those who are called, both Jews and Gentiles.

### **Let us pray**

Lord we praise you and offer you thanksgiving for the splendour of the body and for the amazing temple it represents, may our bodies be obedient to your call, and work tirelessly for justice, and abide peacefully in prayer. And at our death may we be released into your care. Amen.

**Rev Sue Humphries**