

Trinity X (13 July 2023)

“And he went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold therein, and them that bought; saying unto them, It is written, My house is the house of prayer: but ye have made it a den of thieves. And he taught daily in the temple.”

+In the Name...

Once upon a time, at a Parish that will remain nameless, there was an event, a meeting of some kind, where the meeting occurred in the nave of the church. A large table was brought in and placed so the clergy and staff could face the congregation. After the meeting, a young postulant placed a small, handwritten, inconspicuous sign on the table that read, “Reserved for money changers.” The postulant thought his sign extremely clever and hilariously funny. Later that evening he received a phone call from the Rector of the Parish, who

was not nearly as amused by the sign as our postulant was. Live and learn.

Likely you know the basics of this piece of the Gospel. One could not just sacrifice any animal at the temple, but only one worthy of being sacrificed. And these folks, the money changers, were happy to sell it to you. In addition, one could not use any just currency to buy these animals worthy of sacrifice, but one had to use special temple money. And these folks were happy to change your money from wherever you hailed into temple money, for a small fee. You can see where in this scenario there is room for one to be taken advantage of, probably more than once.

My New Testament professor spent a surprisingly large amount of time lecturing on this passage to us, but perhaps not about what you think. We can all look at the money changers and see how it was wrong for them to take advantage of the faithful. Many of us have had

to change dollars into pounds or euros or yen, but it should be done at a fair price. What our professor spent time on was the actions of Our Lord. This is not the usual Jesus we see who always seems to be able to explain things in a calm, cool, and collected way, and suddenly His listeners understand His side of things and agree to change their ways. This is an upset Jesus, Who is so appalled at the behavior of those in the temple that He does not appear to even attempt to explain things to the money changers, but immediately drives them out, upsetting tables, animals, and cash drawers in the process, not to mention the faithful who may have been close at hand. The Church calls this righteous indignation or righteous anger, and it is technically the only time when anger is not a sin. You may remember that anger is one of the Seven Deadly Sins.

My professor's point was simple: there is without doubt a place for righteous anger, but it is much less common than people like to

think it is. He still teaches at Nashotah House, and I wonder if he has bolstered that lecture given the changes in our society in these few short years. He was teaching in a pre- pandemic, pre-George Floyd world. Now it seems as if folks are just looking for a reason to fly off the handle and then claim that they were justified because the issue was of such monumental importance.

Now don't get me wrong: the right to peacefully protest is in our Constitution. Naturally there are some limitations: I cannot protest on someone else's private property, nor may I protest on the Banfield Freeway during the morning commute. But that right to peacefully assemble does not include destroying private property or causing bodily injury. Really, Jesus' behavior seems to fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Does the behavior we see frequently in the news or, sadly, in our own neighborhoods, qualify as righteous anger, or just anger? So

many people have such a short fuse that when something sets one off, it takes no time at all before one is truly angry. A parishioner of this parish recently directed me toward an article in Scientific American titled, “Rude Behavior Spreads Like a Disease”. The author’s claim is that when one is treated rudely, one is more likely to behave in a rude fashion to others. Okay, that makes enough sense, but she goes on to say that not only are you more likely to behave rudely when you have been treated rudely, but you are more likely to behave that way if you just witness rude behavior. That seems less obvious, but it makes sense if you think about it as being legitimized in your mind’s eye: “I see this behavior in public so it must be acceptable.” The author goes one step farther and says that not only do you allow it in yourself, but one begins to see rude behavior when it is not there, almost like one is looking for it. I am sad to say that I have found myself in this very situation at more than one vestry meetings. Of course, at the time I

thought my concern was perfectly legitimate, but then I have to ask myself, even when the vestry meeting has gone on for over two hours, is there anything that really rises to the level of money changers in the temple? Probably not. Like the lecture I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, this article was written before the pandemic and the riots of 2020. Just this week I read an article about mass shootings in America. The author stated, “But the reality is... we *are* in a new normal, we are hotter tempered and shorter fused with a dimmer outlook than ten years ago.” Does that mean there are more instances that rise to the level of necessitating righteous anger to settle them? Probably not, but we would like to think so, wouldn't we? It would give us an excuse for our bad behavior.

The logical question then is whether polite behavior is as contagious as rude behavior. The article does not say (of course, that was not the subject of the study), but one can imagine that it is likely

the only way to combat the almost unrecognizable behavior occurring in American cities. Someone much smarter than me said, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and He practiced that much more often than He did righteous anger.

The author laments that unlike the flu, there is no inoculation against rudeness. The parishioner suggested that grace, which is ours for the asking, could be one. Perhaps, but grace still needs our cooperation. I think of inoculation as just doing its job; all I had to do was get the shot. Jesus made a decision in that temple, and He was in full control of His actions. We need to be careful in our decisions and be in control of ourselves, whatever we decide to do. The author of the article on mass shooting concluded by saying that we need to “tame back our wilder societal impulses of incivility, campy rhetoric, and overly inflammatory hyperbole because it fits our pet narrative”. Ouch! So yes, the parishioner was correct: God’s grace is the best

medicine to give us that cure, but we must take the time to ask for it in prayer and by receiving the sacraments. We as a society need to do better. We as Christians need to do better. Well, at least I need to do better.

+In the Name...