

In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. (John 2:14)

One year, we had a holiday in France. We booked a week in a caravan park near Paris, staying in one of their 'static caravans'. The idea was that we would have a day at Euro Disney and another trip into Paris itself as neither Michelle nor I had been since childhood and we wanted the boys to see it. We ended up driving into the centre of Paris as the train would have been ridiculously expensive. We ended up parking in an amazingly tall and narrow building - to park it was like driving up a helter-skelter. This was also blindingly expensive but what a view from the top! It turned out we were really close to the Eiffel Tower which was later in the day to be illuminated in a stunning light show. It was one of those 'wow' moments, like seeing its cousin, The Statue of Liberty, with our own eyes for the first time.

When we found the Eiffel Tower some time later on foot, I was struck by the number of people with sheets laid out on the ground selling trinkets to the tourists. There were all sorts of gaudy and nasty-looking souvenirs, chief among them, unsurprisingly, miniature caricatures of the famous tower that would have made Monsieur Eiffel weep had he seen them. There were so many sellers competing for your business that it was all you could do to avoid tripping over them. It would have been lovely to have had an uninterrupted view of the splendid edifice without this mass of people gathered around its base.

Crowds of people are often seen as a marketing opportunity, whether that's selling cold drinks in a hot city or, as here, tatty models or fridge magnets of world heritage sites such as the Eiffel Tower or Stonehenge. First Century Palestine was no different. Hundreds of thousands of visitors filed into the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover and make their mandatory pilgrimage to the Temple. The Temple which Herod the Great had been renovating since about 20 BC (hence the reference in verse 20 of our passage.) Money changers had set up their tables in the outer courts of the Temple so they could provide pilgrims with their Temple Coins which, alone, could be used to buy the best animal sacrifices. My mild annoyance in Paris or at any other overrun site of interest was nothing compared to the anger with which Jesus reacted on his arrival.

He was so furious that he made a whip and drove all the animals out of the Temple precincts. So infuriated at the money changers exploiting the other pilgrims with their extortionate currency conversion rates was Jesus that he poured the coins out and overturned the tables. Gentle Jesus, meek and mild?

A question that candidates for the Methodist Ministry are nearly always asked at least once in their selection process is: 'What makes you angry?' If it's only bad refereeing of a rugby match, then I think that wouldn't qualify as reasonable. However, ministers and other Christian people should be angry at some things; injustice, discrimination, prejudice, poverty, to name a few. How we react when we are angry is significant. If we can demonstrate that our anger is justified and that our response is reasonable in the circumstances, then surely it is okay to be angry at times.

Jesus was saddened that a place of worship had become a market-place. Prayerfulness and spirituality had given way to market forces and the perpetuation of a religious system designed to subjugate the people.

Jesus reacted as angrily as we see in the whole of the gospels. His is a righteous anger and his actions are an act of prophecy to those around him; This is how it is and it shouldn't be like this. Sometimes God requires our actions rather than our words, alone. In verse 18 we read; The Jews then said to him, "*What sign can you show us for doing this?*" They have missed the point. Jesus is the sign and some did not see it. We have to be careful when we read 'The Jews' in the gospel passage because that refers to the religious elite who were also the ruling class even though at this time, all under the occupying rule of Rome. Sometimes, we might mean something else when we say 'Jews' and we must not fall into the xenophobic practice of anti-Semitism by confusing ancient terms with current ones.

Jesus was, is and will be the only sign we will ever require from God. His life, ministry, death and resurrection are the model for our lives. We are created in the image and likeness of God whether we are male or female and by whatever other classification we may make for ourselves. Our lives must be lived as far as is humanly possible according to the example of Jesus - as he lived in his humanity. This calls us to acts of compassion, unbounded love, respect, dignity and all the other ultimately divinely human attributes we see in Jesus.

Those who challenged Jesus for a sign were told by him that his life is the sign. It is a sign for all those who have eyes to see it. He would rise three days after his execution as the hope of eternal life for us who follow. He is the Temple. His hearers couldn't understand how the building they believed he was referring to could be rebuilt in 3 years when it had taken Herod the Great 46 years to have not quite finished his renovations. In about 35 more years, the building would be almost completely destroyed by the Romans never to be rebuilt again. This would have become recent history, in all probability, by the time John's Gospel was written. The Temple destroyed in AD 70, the gospel written circa AD 100.

The Disciples remembered his words spoken here after he had been brought back to life. Let us remember that however wonderful a building might appear to us, even to the point of making it onto the World Heritage List, Jesus was claiming that he was the stone that the builders rejected, and on that foundation must we build our lives. We must not worship a building; church, home, sports stadium etc. Rather let us worship the living God and be built (as living stones; 1 Peter 2:5) into a spiritual temple:

²²The stone which the builders rejected as worthless
turned out to be the most important of all.

²³This was done by the Lord;
what a wonderful sight it is!

²⁴This is the day of the Lord's victory;
let us be happy, let us celebrate!

²⁵Save us, Lord, save us!
Give us success, O Lord! (Psalm 118)