

## Righteous indignation

4 3 18

Almighty God,  
whose most dear Son went not up to joy  
but first he suffered pain,  
and entered not into glory until he was crucified:  
mercifully grant that we, walking in the way of the cross,  
may find it none other than the way of life and peace.

Our text may be found in today's gospel – John chapter 2 and verse 16:

**'Stop making my Father's house a marketplace'**

There are seven deadly sins. How many can you name? (Pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice, sloth). I could only manage four before I had to consult my copy of 'Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable' and then I found I'd substituted the modern word anger for the actual word in the list – 'wrath'.

And it is wrath or anger that I'd like to look at this morning in John's account of when Jesus, full of righteous indignation at the fact that outer court of the Temple in Jerusalem, the Court of Gentiles, had been turned into a marketplace: stalls selling animal sacrifices and stalls to exchange money – Roman denarii into Temple shekels. Jesus makes a whip of cords then drives out these market traders from this sacred site, overturning their tables and threatening them and possibly actually hitting them! **'Zeal'** for the house of the Lord!

It is interesting to note that in today's Old Testament lesson, taken from the book of Exodus, chapter 20, we hear an expression of the Ten Commandments. None of the ten actually forbid anger. But it is possible that to break any of the ten might produce righteous indignation on the part of those offended: murder, theft, adultery, lying, envy, lack of respect for God or parents to name but seven. And it is interesting to note that Jesus sums up all 613 commandments found in Judaism in one simple principle, the principle of love – the love of God and the love of neighbour/stranger as we love ourselves.

So if love is the guiding principle of our behaviour, how can one justify Jesus' anger in these circumstances? To understand, we need to appreciate that the Temple was the place where people could come to worship God, to be in the presence of God. At the heart of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, the sanctuary where only the High Priest could enter, then the Court of Priests where sacrifices were made, then the Court of Men where Jewish men could pray, then Court of Women where Jewish women could pray, and finally, almost on the outside of the temple complex, the Court of Gentiles where non-Jews could congregate to pray and feel the presence of God in this most sacred place in Judaism. But instead of it being hallowed ground, even for the non-Jew to approach God as far as was permitted, the Court of Gentiles had become a noisy market, a busy short-cut through a crowded Jerusalem.

And the key to understand Jesus' anger is in the phrase 'righteous indignation'. The anger Jesus felt was informed by his zeal for what was right and proper – in this instance Jesus was indignant at what he saw as a blatant perversion of what

was right and proper in how the Temple, the house of God, 'Bethel', was being treated, turning a place where people should be able to access God into a place of profit.

Of course, anger should not be our default position. We shouldn't lose our temper over trivial things. But there is a time and a place where it may be appropriate to burn with righteous indignation and to confront evil to the best of our ability.

Is it not wonderful, therefore, that our faith that embodies the principle of turning the other cheek, of expressing love and respect for people, should also contain instances when Jesus expresses anger appropriately ?

Well worth reflecting on where you are and when you are challenged.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*4<sup>th</sup> March 2018*

G: Sermons 37 : Righteous indignation

