

ORPHIR and STENNESS CHURCH
Transcript of Zoom Service, Sunday 07.03.21; Lent3B

Introduction and Prayer – Martin;

Good morning, wherever you are. It's good to speak to you again.

"We are not gathered in the same building, but at this time, when we need each other so much, we worship together, from where we are – knowing that God can hear us all and can blend even distant voices into one song of worship."

National Worship Team (ed.)

Today we think about Jesus 'cleansing the temple'. We wonder why he was so angry, and we think what it all means for us.

A Prayer:

In the noise of the Temple, in the pushing and the shoving,
Jesus made a holy place.

In the busy times of our lives, in the bustle of our homes and our affairs,
in the quietness of our hearts,
Jesus, make a holy place. Amen.

Hymn 641 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Opening Prayer and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray

As we continue in this time of Lent,
as we seek to be the Church of Christ in this place and in this time,
may God help us to clear our hearts and minds of all clutter and distractions;
to set aside human thoughts of losses and gains,
and grant us the faith and commitment to persevere to the end of this unfolding season.
In our lives, and in our worship,
may we be always mindful of the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this our Lenten journey of faith,
we give thanks that Christ is our guide, our helping hand when the way is steep,
our encouragement when our steps falter;
our reassurance that, beyond the clouds of this present time,
the sun is shining,
and our destination glorious beyond our imaginings.
We give thanks that we walk in his company,
and in the security of his presence.

Hearing the wisdom in the words he speaks,
may we also find words that speak of love, and hands that work for peace.
May we be always open to the challenge and guidance of his example.
When the need arises for someone to speak up for truth and justice,
may we not be afraid to overturn a few tables, as did he within the Temple.

May Jesus help us to see the world as through his eyes,
that those we meet may see him reflected through ours.
These and all our prayers we offer in his name, and we join in the words that Jesus taught us:
*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power,
and the glory, for ever. Amen.*

Readings: Tracy

1 Cor. 1:18-25 (NRSVA): *Christ the Power and Wisdom of God*

[For] The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.'

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Hymn For Your glory

2nd Reading:

John 2:13-22 (NRSVA): *Jesus Cleanses the Temple*

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Amen. *Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church*

Message:

Google tells me that, in UK at the present time, a labourer might earn somewhere about £80 - £100 per day. In Jesus's time, the going daily rate for a labourer was a Denarius. Modern equivalents are very difficult to calculate, but in today's terms that would be about 40p per day.

Suppose you were a labourer going to the Temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; to worship and to offer sacrifice. You've been looking forward, and saving up for years to do it. On the way there, you go to the market. You can't afford to buy a bullock, or a calf, or a lamb for the sacrifice. You settle on a pair of pigeons - £1.50 - and haggle the seller down to £1.00. You could have got them for a day's wages at home - 40p.

At the Temple, the huge outer court, the court of the Gentiles, 500 metres by 300, is mobbed. The din is unbelievable. People selling livestock for the sacrifices; shouting, arguing about prices and exchange rates, and commission. If you'd expected some quiet, a bit of reverence, you'd be badly disappointed.

You have to pay the Temple Tax. A half-shekel - 60 pence. You offer a 2-shekel coin - £2.40 - a week's wages. But it has the image of Caesar on it, so it is unclean. You have to change it into 'clean' money. The Money-Changer charges 10p for every half shekel. There goes another 40p. £1.00 just to get in.

The Inspector needs to pass your pair of pigeons as perfect and unblemished.

Inspection Fee: 10 pence. Rejected. What to do?

"Buy them from my friend's stall."

"Pair of pigeons £8 - make it £7.50 and I'll take the rejects off your hands." Daylight robbery!

Lad behind you in the queue says "Better take them, Boy. That Inspector will never pass anything bought outside."

You buy the pigeons. You've spent £9.60. Four weeks wages to worship and sacrifice at the temple.

The Jewish historian Josephus tells that Annas, the high priest, and his four sons, and son-in-law (Caiaphas) - also high priests - operated the biggest racket in town, and made enormous profits from the temple business. It has been estimated that, by today's equivalent, they were making £200 billion per year. Josephus was right to call the temple area a bazaar.

The people were being ripped off in the name of religion. No wonder Jesus was angry. But there was more to Jesus' anger than that.

God's house was being desecrated. All those people arguing about prices and exchange rates. Pandemonium. Worship without thought, preparation, or reverence: an affront to God then, and an affront to God now.

All this in support of a system of sacrificial worship that the prophets had been saying for years was obsolete and no longer relevant. Isaiah tells us: *the Lord says:*

I have had enough of burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts;

I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (Isaiah 1:11-17).

We no longer think of animal sacrifice, but the attitude is still there. There have always been people who think that if they lavish money on the building, that's all they need do to put themselves right with God. A stained-glass window, a new organ, beautiful woodwork, redecoration - can be welcome things, given sincerely in love and generosity. But in themselves they can be no substitute for true devotion.

The Temple had become a place where nobody could worship. No wonder Jesus was angry. I don't go for the old "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild" ideas. Jesus was very angry.

Anger is a powerful emotion. It must be managed properly. Every day, on TV, we see the devastating consequences of inappropriate anger. The internet shows about 45 million courses and websites dealing with Anger Management. *Is it wrong to be angry?*

Is it wrong to be angry with extremists who murder innocent people?

Or with men like Jimmy Saville and many others like him?

Or parents who abuse their children?

Is it wrong to be angry? Is it wrong to be angry at discrimination against refugees; immigrants; women, people of different colour, religion, or sexual orientation?

Jesus himself tells us:

"Whoever is angry with his brother will be brought to trial." (Matt. 5:22).

Yet he himself frequently expressed anger, as with the religious leaders and those who made the temple into a bazaar. His was a focussed anger that issued in action to right a wrong: not the destructive, brooding, festering, unforgiving, revenge-seeking anger that issues in violence and lifelong grudges.

The Take-Home Message today?

Jesus was showing that the Temple ritual and sacrifice was no longer relevant: could do nothing to lead people to God.

Why? Because Jesus had come.

A few pages further on in John's Gospel we have:

'God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him may not be lost, but have eternal life.' John 3:16 (NCV)

Jesus himself says:

"I came to give life — life in all its fullness". (John 10:10; NCV)

We live in worrying and troubled times: a Pandemic that is killing people in their thousands, and doing untold damage to the economy, and all on top of disasters, both natural and man-made, throughout the world. In our own country, people in high places telling lies and falling out with one another.

Yet there is light at the end of the tunnel.

It is a light that grows brighter as we journey with Christ towards Easter. It is the light of the love of God that shines from that empty tomb on Easter morning.

Amen. SDG.

Hymn 485 Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Prayer for Others and Blessing

Let us pray for other people.

We pray for our church, here, throughout the Islands, and throughout the world, and for those who worship today, gathered in small groups, or through the Internet. Wherever we are, may we worship in sincerity and commitment, and to the glory of God.

Let us pray for those who are away from home, and for those unable to travel, or to meet with loved ones, and for those confined to their own homes, because of current restrictions, or for any other reason.

We pray for people who are unwell, or in any kind of suffering, thinking especially of all those affected in any way by the Covid-19 Pandemic: those suffering from the disease, those who treat them, nurse them, comfort them, and for all who suffer hardship because of the disease and the control measures.

We pray for all the many people who grieve for loved ones who have died, from Covid, or from any other cause, and for people everywhere who are lonely, or worried, or sad.

We pray for our country and its governments: for those with power to make a difference; those in positions of authority, who make decisions, that they may act wisely and justly, and for the benefit of all.

We pray for our world:

for people for whom the Pandemic is added to all the poverty and distress brought by storm, flood or drought, and famine, war, or terrorism.

We pray for those with inadequate food or clothing or shelter;

for those who suffer injustice and oppression.

We pray for all those we love, especially for those we carry in our thoughts and hearts at this time.

Pause

We pray for ourselves, grateful for the love and the goodness of God, yet aware of our own failings, conscious of our complacency.

May the Holy Spirit disturb us and urge us toward better things.

May the love of God comfort and support us and those whom we love, now and always. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now may you stay safe in the way of Christ;

May God's peace be in you,

God's love enfold you,

God's word direct you,

God's joy uphold you,
God's strength protect you:
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be with you, and remain with you,
now and evermore. Amen.