

I remember this particular day very well even though it was over 30 years ago. I was in college sharing an on campus apartment with three other women. I returned home after basketball practice on a Saturday afternoon to be met with a lot of yelling. My flat mates' sister was up from NYC and she was very upset. To my surprise I got included in her shouting. All of us did. She was upset at the state of our bathroom which was very dirty. How could we live like that? Didn't we know how to clean? I was horrified that she had to say that to us and ran to the bathroom. I didn't remember it being that dirty, but it sure enough was. With new eyes I saw the state of our shower and started cleaning immediately. I have never forgotten that day. I was embarrassed, but I was also shocked at how blind I had been to the state of the bathroom which I used every day.

My reaction must not have been dissimilar to those around Jesus in this morning's gospel as he storms into the temple and drives out those selling animals with a whip of cords. He overthrows the money changers tables. He says – Stop making my father's house a marketplace. Those who were there must have been shocked. What was wrong – they must have wondered? This was business as usual for them. These practices were needed. To worship God, one needed an unblemished animal which was hard to bring with you especially if you had to travel a long way. Therefore, animals were sold in the temple. To buy them you needed shekels so you had to exchange your money. You couldn't do that without moneychangers. What exactly did Jesus think was wrong? For years, I have read in the commentaries that the selling of animals and exchanging of money was a system of exploitation via exorbitant tithes and taxes that blocks equal access to the divine. A poor person would not be able to worship as a rich person did.

Other explanations say Jesus is upset because the people are compartmentalizing their faith, making the temple "sacred" and home "secular." Those who come to worship go about their daily lives without much thought as to God, and then come to the Temple to be holy. Truly following God would mean taking the sacred along with you throughout your week. You don't just come to temple to sacrifice and get right with God, you actually have to live your faith the other six days of the week.

Amy Levine¹ gives a great analogy for today "The church member sins during the workweek, either by doing what is wrong or by failing to do what is right. Then on Sunday morning, this same individual, perhaps convinced of [their] personal righteousness, heartily sings the hymns, happily shakes the hands of others, and generously puts a fifty-dollar bill in the collection plate. That makes the church a den of robbers -- a cave of thieves. It becomes a safe place for those who are not truly repentant and who do not truly follow what Jesus asks. The church becomes a place of showboating, not of fishing for people."

¹ Quoted by Debie Thomas in Journey with Jesus. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2937-not-in-god-s-house>

In either way of looking at today's gospel reading, Jesus is getting everyone's attention on what they have not been able to see. He forces them to take a look at "how we do it at the Temple." We don't find out how or if the practices Jesus was railing against changed, but Jesus' actions and anger can point us to taking a look at our own worship and see where we have clung to the status quo, the way we have always done things at the expense of encountering the God we seek.

This past year we have become very familiar with changes in the status quo. Covid 19 has upturned our tables in so many ways and we have had to adapt. Jesus didn't overturn the tables this time, but it is an opportunity to take a look at how we worship and how we practice our faith. I think we have learned some amazing lessons. More of us are praying at home and not just when we gather online for a service.

Think about Ash Wednesday, when ashes were mailed out along with prayers. I heard such great stories. One was of a grandparent and a grandchild who said the prayers together and imposed ashes on one another's heads. Ashes were shared with neighbors. We could not come to church to have ashes put on their heads so we discovered different ways.

Pause for a moment. How are you praying differently in this time? How are you worshipping differently? How are you relying on God to get you through this time? What is Jesus inviting you to change – yes change, more change – even now after all the change we have been through? And as more people get vaccinated and we start to ponder going back into the church, what will not be the same because not the same is better, because not the same brings us closer to following Jesus.

Debie Thomas² writes "Jesus is not a protector of the status quo. Jesus has no interest in propping up institutions of faith that elevate comfort and complacency over holiness and justice. No. Jesus is a disrupter. A leveller. An upender. As his disciples immediately realize when he throws out the moneychangers and occupies the temple, *zeal* is what animates the Messiah. Fervor, not casualness. Depths, not surfaces. He will not tolerate the desecration of his Father's house. He is not impressed by "marketplace" faith."

We are always being called to keep our eyes open not just in our worship, but in all the ways we follow Jesus. In our service to others, in our welcome, in our asking for forgiveness, in how we love one another, in our working for justice for all. While we may think we are not desecrating our Father's house, we can become blind to what is happening - just as my roommates and I did with that dirty shower. We get settled into our ways.

We may think – well the worship is OK. Too much trouble to figure out what we could do to include the needs of more people.

I haven't opened my bible in awhile. I hear it during church. That's enough.

² Journey with Jesus. <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/2937-not-in-god-s-house>

I don't need to call the parishioner, I haven't seen or talked to for many months. They are probably managing.

My friend seemed hurt at the comments I made. I don't need to apologize. They will get over it.

The food pantry is doing fine. I don't need to check and see if they need help in any way.

The people who live in overcrowded housing down the street don't want me getting involved. I'll probably mess up a situation that works for them.

There are many ways for us to stay blind and yet so many opportunities to have zeal for how Jesus asks us to live.

Jesus calls us to live with the zeal – the zeal of following God and bringing reconciliation to this world in all that we do. Don't settle. Stop. Pause. Listen. How is Jesus calling you to stop and overturn the status quo, see the blind spots, and step away from the easy way. Take up Jesus' call with the passion of Jesus Christ in your heart.