

19th March 2006 Lent Three B
Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Exodus 20:1-17
- Psalm 19 page 239
- 1Corinthians 1:18-25
- John 2:13-22

Text of readings is available at <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/BLent/bLent3.htm>

Sunday 19th March 2006 Lent 3B; Jesus cleanses the Temple

I wonder how we might feel if someone came into St Philip's and started pushing the furniture around

knocked over the paschal candle

pulled the cloth off the altar and

threw the communion vessels on the floor?

I imagine we might get pretty angry! What would we do? Restrain the person? Call the police?

This sort of thing may not be a regular event now but way back in the time of the Reformation in the 16th century such things did happen and then again 100 years later in the confrontation between the forces of Oliver Cromwell and the clergy loyal to King Charles I.

It still happens in places where Christians are persecuted but for different reasons.

Just before I became Rector of St Philip's there was great distress because there were attempts at re-arranging the layout of the church. An altar was at one time along the side wall with the pews facing it! Even before that people left the church over the use of a new language prayer book and of course worst of all. "They've changed the Lord's Prayer!"

It was interesting that on Wednesday at the Mapping the Mission with Bishop George the days of the altar and moving pews were mentioned.

So! What do we make of the story of Jesus near the time of the Passover going to Jerusalem and into the temple and

"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" telling them "stop making my Father's house a market place"

There can be no doubt that something like this happened, but John puts it in a very different place in his version of events because he want his readers (that's us!) to see the symbolism! It is the system of animal sacrifice which he confronts because later we will hear of the sacrifice of Jesus himself. His willing offering of himself!

Jesus embodies all that the prophets had been saying about animal sacrifice not being enough — it is ourselves that God wants!

His disciples remembered the scriptures which said "Zeal for your house will consume me"

But then there comes the confrontation with "the Jews" asking for the "sign" which Jesus will give for his actions.

Recall those words in Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians today "Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom". The Greeks were notorious for searching out new ideas and philosophies. Playing mind games! The Jews on the other hand wanted "signs" like the burning bush, the manna in the wilderness, or miracles to show that God was at work.

So Jesus says "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"

Naturally the Jews think of the temple building but Jesus' words are cryptic and we are told that "after he was raised from the dead his disciple remembered that he had said this.

The sign he offers is death and resurrection.

Again the symbolism of Jesus death being confused with the destruction of the temple points out that HE IS THE TEMPLE PAR EXCELLENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE! This temple WILL NOT be destroyed!

The whole story also tells me that Jesus is inaugurating something new, or rather, restoring something which is very, very old! The idea that "the sacrifice of God is a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart he will not despise" Psalm

AND

Telling us that it is within ourselves that is truly God's temple.

So the whole cleansing and destruction of the temple discussion is about getting back to basics! It is asking the question What is absolutely necessary for our relationship, our worship and our service of God?

And if we look around

not a lot is absolutely necessary!

I was told that for a Christian priest (and therefore a Christian community), a Bible, water, bread and wine were all that was needed!

Everything else is extra! Of course faith hope and love etc. etc.

So when we met to talk about the Mapping of our Mission as the Body of Christ in this place we had to know that everything else was negotiable.

So on Wednesday evening eight hardy souls turned out on a stormy rainy night to meet with Bishop George Browning to Map the Mission for St Philip's. Our part of the broader plan to Map the mission of the Diocese!

Our gathering was hardly representative of the parish even though we had representatives from the extremities of the parish area - Murrumbateman and Burra!

Nevertheless we met to consider the road and direction ahead and what we need to do for us to fulfill our part of God's mission.

At the Mapping exercise we were challenged by Bishop George who said we are "one of the parishes most likely to go out of business". We need to think ahead to pray and plan how we might be in future years. He simply meant we cannot expect the future to be like the past!

As a result of the Mapping the Mission gathering on Wednesday we decided to look at just what we as a Parish have achieved since the last Mapping exercise in 2003. At least we can see what positive steps we have made!

We also decided to try and re-word the latest Mapping document so that it is more understandable.

It was also decided to produce our version of the document with our answers for your comment.

The maps at the study on Wednesday morning were to get us to think about events and experiences which had changed the direction of our life. How might we change direction to be more effective as a Christian Community/

— Mention of AGM as too much talk about finances. — finance is about where we place priorities for Mission. (reconsider)

If we look at the first reading we have the ten commandments, the rules devised to keep people faithful to God AND in healthy relationships with one another BUT if you look closely at the very beginning of that summary the very first words are NOT a commandment.

They are: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me."

BEFORE the commandments is a reminder that this is all about Grace!

The commandments are the response to that Grace - the human structures which enable us to live in that grace!

We humans all need structures and forms to organize ourselves!

Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom - that was the form and structure they understood.

BUT we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called (those who respond to God) whether they are Jews Greeks or whoever....
Christ (is) 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.

With all of our "best laid plans of mice and men" all of our organization, our planning and budgets, our nice church services and buildings, God call us to look beyond and find what it is to which we are being called.

God calls us to discover that Christ meets us

and calls *us* to meet his self-offering with our own AND That Christ our temple calls us to become one too!