

# The Angry King of Peace...

*“Then he entered the Temple area and began driving out those who were selling.*

*‘It is written,’ he said to them, ‘my house will be a house of prayer;  
but you have made it a den of robbers.’”*

*-- Luke 19:45-46*

As we continue on our Lenten journey by reflecting carefully on some of the events and teachings from Jesus’ final week we encounter a passage that is almost startling. When Jesus draws near to Jerusalem and enters as her King, he chooses to come as the King of Peace, but what we find in this short passage is anything but peaceful. We are introduced here to a Jesus that is outraged, a Jesus that lashes out in anger and causes havoc in the Temple (of all places). This is not the Jesus we have come to know, this is not the Jesus we expect to find... But as much as this passage might surprise us it is also a real and true encounter with Jesus and so we must deal with it in all honesty. We must allow Jesus, who is found acting so boldly and in such raw anger in this instance, to confront us with the Gospel and see whether or not our own lives might drive him to anger.

But what is it that would drive the King of Peace to such violent anger? Three things stand out from the events in this passage; three things that quite clearly drives Jesus to anger. *Firstly*, exploitation of others, especially the weak and vulnerable. The money changers and sellers weren’t doing anything wrong by simply plying their trade, per se. After all, selling and foreign exchange, even in the ancient world, was a vital component of the economy and the well being of society. What they were doing wrong was that they were taking advantage of people who had no other choice but to make use of their services. They had a monopoly of sorts and so were found to be grossly overcharging people who had come to worship. *Secondly*, exchanging the sacred for the profane. Jesus was outraged to see these money changers and sellers using a sacred space and occasion to generate greedy profit and in so doing exchanging what should have been a beautiful and holy thing for what is worldly and sinful. We must be careful that we come to God simply for the joy of being with him, that when we serve Him we do so for no other reason than to honour him; if we attach our own agendas and promotion to our worship and service we run the risk of exchanging the sacred for the profane. *Finally*, excluding outsiders. The whole event takes place in the court of the gentiles, which was the outer-most space in the whole Temple complex. There was a literal wall past which non-Jews could not go and this was a concrete way of excluding people. When Jesus quotes Isaiah by saying, “My house will be a house of prayer” we can assume that he knows the rest of that verse which reads: “for all nations”. God’s intention is always to include and welcome and embrace – when we build walls and create rules that expressly exclude others we are running dangerously close to evoking the anger of Jesus (especially when those walls and rules imply a certain superiority on our part!).

As we continue to reflect on our own lives during Lent, using Luke’s account of Jesus’ final week as our mirror against which we can reflect, let’s ask ourselves the tough and piercing questions that this event in Jesus’ ministry raises – are we not at times guilty of taking advantage of others through our relationships with them, using others for our own benefit – a promotion at work, a favour of some kind, etc.? Are we not also sometimes guilty of exchanging the sacred for the profane by coming to worship with hidden agendas or spending more time serving God’s people for our own reward rather than His glory. Are we not, sadly, guilty of excluding others on the basis of race or gender or economic status? If we are guilty of these things we must not be surprised to find Jesus angry.