

Year B* Lent 3* March 19, 2006
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To Share His Anger

The Jesuit priest Donal Neary says:

God asks us in Jesus to share his anger when in his name
peoples' dignity is diminished, or love is abused,
or the poor are exploited,
or when he himself is neglected. This is true religion:
to act justly,
love tenderly,
and walk humbly with our God. -Donal Neary, SJ

Through Jesus we are to share God's anger.

Jesus is angry today. He is fighting mad. Because he sees something has happened. What God wants us to be and what we have become are not one in the same. Jesus is mad at a system that has run amok. And he's mad enough to turn over tables and maybe even chase us out of the building if that's what it takes to wake us up.

Our young people are studying Mark's gospel in the form of a graphic novel called Marked. In the cleansing of the Temple story when Jesus storms into the Temple and as he is throwing tables and kicking people out he shouts;

For the last time ... 1. AM NOT NICE!

I like to believe Jesus is always loving, always compassionate, always merciful, but when something comes between the way things are and the way God wants them to be he is not nice.

Jesus sees what God intends for human beings and he sees something getting in the way. He sees a religious system which emphasizes outward shows of sacrifice without hands on compassion for those who are suffering.

He sees a political system which relies on violence, brutality, and cruelty.

He sees an economic system which forever works to the benefit of the wealthy and increasingly grinds the poor deeper into the ground.

When Jesus turns over the tables in the Temple he is attacking; false religion, oppressive politics, and greed in commerce, In Jesus' day all three were wrapped up together in the Temple. We try to separate religion, politics, and commerce. But in Jesus' day they were identical and the Temple was the place they most closely came together.

For Jesus to accomplish the same symbolic action today he would have to go to the White House and knock over the president's desk. Then make his way to the Stock Exchange in New York and rip out the ticker tape or whatever we use now to say what directions our stocks are going. Then after all that, assuming he made it past the Secret Service in Washington and security in New York, he'd probably have to catch a flight to Rome and kick the pope out of the Vatican before the Swiss Guard could get their hands on him.

What Jesus did in cleansing the Temple, and he did it for all times and all places including this time and this place, what Jesus did was challenge all uncompassionate religion, all oppressive politics, and all greedy commerce.

Jesus Christ, Son of God Savior, have mercy on us all.

Whether he sees these things, in the Temple of God, in you or me, or in our country or anyone else's country, in our courts, or our places of business, Jesus' response is the same.

When something is in the way of what we are and what Jesus sees we are meant to be, he stops being nice. He isn't nice. Or rather, he as nice as a surgeon who knows the tumor must be removed. Or, he is as nice as the midwife who know this baby has got to come out ... now! Or he as nice as our conscience which says, it's now or never, time to start getting better. Do you see whose hands we have fallen into?

We've fallen into the hands of Jesus. Some days we may wish we had fallen into the hands of ... someone else ... someone with a little lower expectation ... someone who would mind his own business. But that's the thing about Jesus, the way we go about being religious, the way we do our politics, the way we go about making and using our money, the way we are as people, it's his business. And our fate has placed us in his hands.

St. Paul says something very interesting about the real temple Jesus inhabits. He says, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

You are not your own.

We really believe that. We are not our own. We belong to Jesus. So his agenda must become our agenda. And his agenda is pretty amazing.

If our religions are not compassionate they must be reformed.

If our governments are not just and truly committed to peace they must be changed. If we are in business only for our own gain we must turn over the money tables.

Isn't that the gospel today? I'm not making this stuff up. I only work here. Listen to the anger of Jesus. "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 marketplace!"

The Temple was the religious, political, and commercial center of Jesus' world.

He's turning all those tables over. I believe this is true and this is what Jesus does. How this table over-turning applies specifically to the war in Iraq, to the ordination of practicing homosexual persons to the Episcopate, to what stocks we invest in or how we pay our taxes, is a question each of us must do our best to answer. I cannot not answer for all of us. But the answer begins in a surrender. a surrender to the table over-turning Jesus. The one who sees something has gone wrong in our religion, our politics, our commerce. The answer doesn't begin with what I want or what I think. The answer begins with a surrender to Jesus. I ran across a marvelous quote from Martin Luther, the great 16th century reformer. Luther imagines God speaking to him this way.

Things must happen not according to your own understanding, but rather above your own knowledge; immerse yourself in the abandonment of understanding and I will give you my understanding; not knowing where you are going is the right way to know where you are going. My knowing makes you completely unknowing. Thus did Abraham depart from his home without knowing whither. He surrendered himself to my knowledge and traveled the right path to the right end. Behold that is the way of the cross; you cannot find it, I must rather lead you like a blind person. Hence it is not you, nor any human being, nor any creature, but rather I, I myself, who will instruct you through my Spirit and word concerning the path you must stick to. Not the work you choose for yourself, not the suffering you think up for yourself, but what comes to you quite contrary to your choosing, thinking, desiring, that is where you must follow, there you must be a pupil, there it is high time, your teacher has come. (Martin Luther in Luther-Andachten)

Or, in the words of A.A., Let go and let God.

Or, in the words of St. Paul, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Jesus is angry today. Something has gotten in the way of what God wants and what we are.

Jesus has some table over-turning to do,
over-turning the table of our religion,
over-turning the table of our politics,
over-turning the table of the way we do business.