

Lent 3B - 2024

"Never argue with him when he's drunk!"

A man was driving without his seatbelt when he spotted a patrol car right behind him. He grabbed for the belt and put it on. But it was too late, and the red lights began to flash. "You weren't wearing your seatbelt," said the officer. "Yes, I was," said the man, "and if you don't believe me, ask my wife." "So how ABOUT it, ma'am?" asked the cop. "Officer," she said, "I've been married to this man for forty years, and there's one thing I've learned: Never argue with him when he's drunk! Just give him a ticket for not wearing the seat belt."

In today's Gospel, Jesus doesn't bother to argue with the unjust merchants and moneychangers who have converted the Temple of Jerusalem into a noisy "marketplace" and a "hideout of thieves." Instead, he frightens them with his angry order and chases them away, wielding the whip in his hands.

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The Temple

I remember hearing someone say that the money changing activities were taking place in what was known as the "court of the Gentiles." Those Gentiles who wanted to come and pray and worship God were allowed to come into that court, although they didn't get to go into the Temple. If this commotion--think about the chaos and noise and general racket that would have been happening in such a marketplace--were happening in the one place the Gentiles could go to pray and hear the Word of God, then the Gentiles were closed out of their access to God.

So Jesus objected because their activities shut a number of people out of being able to approach God in God's dwelling place (even though they could not enter the temple proper).

Destroy the Temple

"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again." Given that Jesus was standing smack in the middle of a literal, brick-and-mortar temple at the time he said this, it seemed merely obvious that Jesus meant the physical building. And so everyone who heard him responded the same way, "It has taken us forty-six years just to get this far, and even so the construction project isn't finished yet! Now you tell us you could do the whole thing from scratch in under a week!? Right!" According to John, Jesus does not reply to this, and even the disciples didn't understand it until years later after Jesus rose again from the dead.

But although he doesn't say it directly, maybe Jesus wanted them to have the wrong idea as a subtle, yet poignant, way to demonstrate that **just generally they had the wrong idea. They had the wrong focus.** They were obsessed with brick and mortar. Their mention of how long it had taken them to build the temple was a sign that they had lost their way. They no longer had the radical faith of Psalm 69. The psalmist endured insult and injury because of his outrageous belief that the living God actually dwelled in the temple.

But some of the Jews in Jesus' day had forgotten. They saw it as their own accomplishment in which they could do whatever they wanted because it was, after all, their place. (I wish that did not sound so familiar).
(by Scott Hoezee from commentary on John 2:13-22)

"In his note there was a very naughty word."

Paul Harvey tells about a robber in Oceanside, California wearing a motorcycle helmet and carrying a gun who strode into a branch bank. He selected a teller who appeared fiftyish, soft, kindly, an easy mark. He handed her a note demanding money or her life. The woman reached for the cash drawer.

Then she looked again at the note and her eyes flashed, her lips clenched. She pulled the entire cash drawer out, but instead of giving him money, she clobbered the robber over the head with the drawer. And again and again. She was scolding him. Money was flying everywhere and she was beating him and shouting shame on him and bouncing blows off his helmet "until the young man turned and ran. Police caught him in nearby shrubbery. Then they asked the woman teller how come she was about to give him money at gunpoint and then, suddenly, instead, became enraged?

She said, 'In his note there was a very naughty word.'" (Paul Harvey's *For What It's Worth*). — Different people get upset at different things. Jesus shouted, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's House a marketplace!" Jesus got their attention. Sometimes we need to get angry. Anger can lead to creative and constructive solutions. However, Jesus' anger is not the focus of this story. (<https://frtonyshomilies.com/>).