

**Sermon preached by the Rev'd. Cynthia Jackson, Sunday 4th
March, 2018,**

Lent 3, St. Mary's Wimbledon.

When I go up to the London Spirituality Centre I often stop at St Mary, Woolnoth for a coffee and sit in the church. Behind the altar in large gold letters are set out the 10 Commandments and the traditional version of the Lord's Prayer. I can't make up my mind whether it is encouraging to worshippers to meditate on the 10 Commandments before a service or depressing. I am sure that no one would be able to say that they had obeyed all the 10 Commandments each week.

This would have been true too of the Jews in Jesus' day. No one could earn their way to heaven by following the Jewish rules and regulations it was just too complicated. But the Lord's Prayer set alongside the 10 Commandments shows Christians a new way of living. I always think the 10 Commandments emphasise a judgemental God whereas the Lord's Prayer offers Christians a different perspective on God. We see God as a loving heavenly Father.

But Jesus did not come to cast aside the Law and the Prophets but came to fulfil them. From the time when Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem in the Temple at the age of 12, the Temple and all the Jewish rituals would have been important to Jesus. Even as a young boy he felt at home in the Temple and described it as his 'Father's house'.

St Paul, a devout Pharisee, until his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, knew all about following rules and regulations in the Jewish code. In his own words he was extremely zealous for the traditions of his father. (Galatians 1:14). His zeal in persecuting Christians is documented in the Acts of the Apostles, including witnessing the stoning of Stephen to death. But by the time of his ministry to the Gentiles Paul is quite clear as to where his allegiance lies as we heard in our second reading from his letter to the Corinthians:

"...we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ 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..." (1 Cor.1:23-25)

Saul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus had turned his world upside down. From persecuting Christians he became Paul proclaiming Jesus as his Lord and Saviour and spreading that good news to the Gentile world.

Of course the message of Jesus Christ was revolutionary. Yes, Jesus came to turn the world upside down by his message. We see this in today's Gospel passage from John. John's gospel places Jesus over throwing the money changers in the Temple at the beginning of his ministry, whereas Matthew and Mark and Luke do not have Jesus visiting Jerusalem at all during his adult life, until the end of his ministry.

The Temple was the centre of Jewish life, worship, music and politics. All national celebrations and mourning took place there. It was a place where you found an enormous amount of live animals for the ritual sacrifices required by the law. Tom Wright describes the Temple as,
"the focal point of the nation and of the National way of life".

Although the cleansing of the Temple is not a miracle in itself it is a sign of what will be fulfilled by Jesus's death and resurrection. Jesus is horrified at the way the Temple is being misused and he takes a whip driving out the sheep and the cattle and overturns the tables of the money changers as he shouts :

"...Stop making my Father's house a marketplace".

The words of psalm 69 come into the disciples minds:

"The zeal for your house will consume me".

We can certainly regard this as a case of righteous anger.

"The Greek philosopher Aristotle said: ' Anybody can become angry – that is easy; but to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not within everybody's power and is not easy.' We can be sure that in cleansing the temple of the market traders, Jesus was angry with the right people, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way."

But what astonishing words that Jesus uses in reply to the Jews question:

"What sign can you show us for doing this?" (John 2:18)

"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (John 2:19)

No wonder the Jews are scornful and disbelieving of Jesus' words knowing that the temple had been under construction for 46 years. But of course Jesus was referring to the 'temple of his body'. He would be crucified, died and three days later Resurrected. Tom Wright in his commentary on John's Gospel writes:

“Jesus takes the traditions of the temple rebuilding and applies them to himself. He is the reality to which the Temple itself points. His death and resurrection will be the reality to which the whole Passover celebration points.

We are challenged like Saul was challenged on the road to Damascus. If we see the signs that Jesus is doing, then we are called to trust him, and believe in him. As Saul's life was turned upside down on the road to Damascus, and became Paul, a missionary for Christ, so Jesus turns our lives upside down as we respond to his call to take up our cross and follow him.

In order to celebrate Jesus' resurrection on Easter Day we have to be with him as he makes his journey to the Cross and be with him at his Crucifixion. During Lent we are called to consider Paul's words to the Corinthians,
“What does it mean for each one of us to proclaim Christ crucified?”

Amen.