**Holy outrage! 7 March 2021 John 2:13-22**

I wonder if you have heard the term “seeker sensitive churches.

The term Seeker sensitive churches has tended to be associated with a certain group of churches which have taken a particular approach to mission in their communities and have developed into Mega Churches. These churches have often been criticised and assumed to promote shallow teaching. However,*“The basic premise in the seeker-sensitive movement is that there are many people out there who are seeking God and want to know Him, but the concept of the traditional church scares them away from faith in Christ.”[[1]](#footnote-1)*

This premise should be in the forefront of the minds of all churches as we seek to share the good news of Jesus with others and provide a comfortable, relevant and welcoming place in which they can grow in their relationship with Jesus. This position should be able to be maintained alongside appropriate, relevant and challenging teaching.

The story before us today seems to illustrate that Jesus firmly believed that the Temple should be a “seeker sensitive church”.

We don’t necessarily comprehend the full dynamics of this account in our translations of the Bible. In the Greek our first few sentences are one long, complex, uninterrupted sentence, which gives the impression of urgency or haste.[[2]](#footnote-2) His actions grab the attention of all who are present. “Jesus throws the mechanics of Temple worship into chaos, disrupting the temple system during one of the most significant feasts of the year.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Jesus is boldly challenging the authority structures in the Temple, reprimanding them for these practices. It is a head on confrontation with the Temple and its authority.

“[T]he role of the Temple in the ancient world is not primarily a place for people to gather in worship like modern churches. It is a place for the deity – sacred space. It is his home … {it provides} essential linkages between the divine and human realms.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

The original “temple” was the garden of Eden. At that point humankind could be in the Presence of God wherever they went. However after humankind chose to follow their own desires rather than God, a variety of other ways were developed to encounter the Presence of God, culminating in ancient times with the building of the Temple.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The passage before us uses three different Greek words to refer to the Temple. The narrative has Jesus coming to the Temple (*to heiron)* at the feast of the Passover. When he responds with indignation regarding the state of the Court of the Gentile he refers to the Temple as “my Father’s house” (*oikos*). This Temples is precious to Jesus, his “Father’s house”, a place where he too can be aware of the closeness of the Presence of God. Finally, when he speaks of the Temple being destroyed in three days, he uses the word *‘naos’* which is used to refer to the Holy Place in the Temple the inner sanctuary, the centre where the Presence of God rests. So through John’s gospel, we have this pointer very early in the story, regarding the reality that Jesus, who embodies the Presence of God, will ‘be destroyed’ but will also be ‘raised’ ‘reconstructed’ after three days.

By the times of Jesus, the Temple had a series of courts. The outermost Court was the Court of the Gentiles. We sometimes fail to realise that even prior to the coming of Jesus there were Gentiles who were interested in the faith of the Israelites and this court had been provided for them to be able to pray, worship God and encounter God. The next Court was for Israelite women, Then the next for Israelite men, and the innermost courts were for the priests, with the High Priest alone permitted into the innermost space the Joly of Holies, and then only once per year on the Day of Atonement.

The action in the story before us occurs in the Court of the Gentiles. Normally the provision of animals for sacrificing and the facilities to change money over to the Temple currency, were located outside the Temple, but at this time of year, with many visitors coming to the Passover, the Temple authorities had developed the practice of allowing the setting up these stalls in the Court of the Gentiles. One of the major implications of this action was that there was then nowhere for the Gentiles to go to pray, worship and encounter God.

The temple is a place for inclusion and welcome, but they are corrupting that. The Temple is a place to meet with God, but how can they focus on God in the midst of this raucous trading

Those who came to worship in the Temple, like all people, had been created in the image of God, however sin, in all its self-centred forms had marred this image. This marred image was visible in the trading that was going on in the outer court of the Temple.

“Jesus has the authority to challenge the temple system because he is the locus of God’s presence here on earth.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

In the times of Jesus the Temple had been the locus of God’s presence here on earth. In this passage Jesus’ challenge regarding the destruction and “rebuilding” of the “temple” within three days, suggests that Jesus body is now the locus of God. He points to the new reality that he embodies the dwelling place of God, he is the new Temple.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Jesus acted and spoke passionately in this incident. So the disciples reflected upon this and were reminded of Psalm 69 and its reference to “zeal for your house will consume me”[[8]](#footnote-8) Zeal “doesn’t just mean bucket loads of enthusiasm, zeal means a willingness to engage in holy violence to protect God’s reputation and to protect the purity and sanctity of the people of God.”[[9]](#footnote-9) Jesus was moved with this passion in response to what was happening in the Temple. Nothing should stand in the way of people encountering the presence of God.

I wonder what would God think of the practices of our churches toady. He may think we should be noisier about injustice and exploitation. He may think we are driving people away by traditions which don’t provide an accessible way for others to connect with God.

“Jesus challenges a religious system so embedded in its own rules and practices that it is no longer open to a fresh revelation from God, a temptation that exists for contemporary Christianity as well”.[[10]](#footnote-10)

“Christian faith communities must be willing to ask where and when the status quo of religious practices and institutions have been absolutized and, therefore, closed to the possibility of reformation, change and renewal.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

As we approach Easter we particularly remember Jesus willingness to suffer and die for us, that we may know God, that we may experience the presence of God with us at all times. We do not need a church building to encounter the presence of God. We take the presence of God with us, so we too need an openness to offer this presence of God to others.

1. https://www.gotquestions.org/seeker-sensitive-church.html [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Gail R. O’Day, “The gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections” in Leander E. Keck, *The New Interpreters Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes,* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995) 543 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. O’Day, “The gospel of John” 545 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2009) loc 708-712 Kindle [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One,* loc 708-712 Kindle [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. O’Day, “The gospel of John:” 544 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. John 2:21; O’Day, “The gospel of John” 544 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. John2:17; Ps 69:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Michael Bird, Jesus the Game Changer 2, video recording, session 2 (Olive Tree Media, 2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. O’Day, “The gospel of John:” 545 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. O’Day, “The gospel of John” 545 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)