

John 2:13-22
Righteous Indignation
WRCOB 1.16.22

When's the last time you got mad?

I mean really mad?

No, not at your spouse

Or your child

Not at your boss

Or at the guy that just cut you off

But angry at something that was unfair or unkind

Some injustice against someone.

Like when Amaid Arbery was gunned down

While jogging through a residential area.

Or when hearing about child abuse or human trafficking

Or the terrible human rights abuses by corrupt governments.

I hope you get angry over these things.

Because it is godly to get angry.

But . . . but . . . isn't anger a sin?

James 1:20 NIV . . . human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

But the anger towards the evils and sins in the world today
Is justified and an anger God endorses.

Because, it is through the emotion of righteous indignation
That injustices in the world are corrected.

Take the Civil Rights movement in the 60s
Or the protests following George Floyd.

And I think one of the problems in the world today
Is that we don't get angry enough
Over the unfair treatment of others.

We have become indifferent.

Today's Scripture Lesson reminds us
That if Jesus was righteously indignant
Over the injustices he witnessed.

We should be too!

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Now, I don't want us to get bogged down
In trying to figure out

Why the cleansing of the temple
Takes place in the Gospel of John
At the beginning of Jesus' ministry

As opposed to, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke
Who place it at the end of Jesus' ministry.

Some say Jesus cleansed the temple twice

Both at the beginning and at the end of Jesus' ministry.

That, to me, seems a bit of a stretch.

But whether he did it at the beginning
Or the end of his ministry is not as important

As is the unquestionable fact
That since all the gospels recorded it
The importance of the day is not to be overlooked.

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We follow Jesus from Cana to Capernaum to Jerusalem
To the Passover celebration
Taking place at the temple.

Jesus enters the temple.

It is hot, noisy, and crowded!

People from all have moved in on the city
Making Passover all the more chaotic.

It is further congested
By the money changers and merchants.

The Temple authorities allowed the money-changers
To use the Temple's outer courts

Where they exchange foreign currency
Into local currency to pay the temple tax.

They also have allowed merchants

Into the outer-courts of the temple.

They're there to sell animals for sacrifice

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Between the hawking of the traders

The bawling of the cattle, the bleating of sheep

And the upset voices of the customers

The atmosphere is likened to livestock market.

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Jesus and the disciples enter the Temple to worship.

And as the disciples enter the sanctuary

Out of the corner of their eye

They see Jesus make a couple of swift moves.

And with whip in hand

He begins driving and pushing

Everyone and everything out.

They watch as he sweeps the coins off the tables

And overturns them.

You can see the money changers

Scurrying around on their hands and knees

Chasing the coins as they roll around on the floor

Underfoot of the stampeding animals.

Jesus shows no mercy until every last trader

And every last animal has been driven from the temple.

It's quite the spectacle Jesus created.

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They call this passage the cleansing of the temple
And frankly, it makes us a little uncomfortable.

Particularly those of us who see Jesus as a peacemaker.

His anger unsettles us.

Jesus is anything but "meek and mild!"

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It's called righteous indignation
Anger over some form of injustice or sin.

Maybe an understatement

But Jesus had issues with the church of his day.

This isn't the only time Jesus got angry.

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Later, in his ministry, as recorded in Matthew 23
Jesus lets out a rant towards the scribes and Pharisees.

The whole chapter is devoted to his rather choice words.

He calls them hypocrites, blind fools
Serpents and a brood of vipers.

He declares they are like whitewashed tombs
Outwardly beautiful,
But inside a pile of dead bones.

Again, this outburst is pointed
To the religious institution of the day.

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Another example of his anger is found in Mark 3:1-5.

It was the Sabbath and Jesus and the disciples
Were in the synagogue.

A man was there with a withered hand.

The scribes and Pharisees watched what Jesus would do.

Mark 3:4-5 (ESV)

4 And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. 5 And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.

What Jesus saw in the Temple on the Day of Passover
Angered him.

Church had turned into a livestock market.

Hawkers in the outer courts scamming the public
Traders with cattle and sheep
Traipsing through the hallways of the temple!

Jesus acted.

But note, Jesus never harmed anyone.

He used the whip to drive out the sheep and cattle.

The text never says he used it against the traders.

It was an awe-striking occasion to remember.

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With righteous indignation

Jesus cleansed the Temple of his day.

I sometimes wonder if Jesus is doing the same today?

I ran across a book this week that I want to read.

The book is entitled:

*A Church Dismantled—A Kingdom Restored:
Why Is God Taking Apart the Church?*

The author is Conrad Kanagy

Pastor of the Elizabethtown Mennonite Church

And sociology professor at Etown College.

In an introduction to the book it says

*The signs of decline are everywhere in the American church.
Instead of finding blame in other places, the author asks
“What if God is dismantling the church?”*

Intriguing thought, isn't it?

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At the beginning of the pandemic

I felt God using the moment

To challenge the church to change.

When the pandemic shut us down

We moved to virtual worship

And saw the benefits of increased viewership.

Most congregations did the same.

The disruption to our normal church life
Gave us pause to rethink who we are
And where we were heading.

It became clear a restructuring was in order.

We have since restructured the church board.

We look with wonder and gratitude
That despite the challenges placed upon us
God has blessed us.

We have the financial means
To beautify our campus and upgrade our facilities.

I believe these are Spirit-led changes
That we might not have done
Without the disruption of the pandemic.

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On the seemingly downside, since the pandemic
We have seen church attendance drop.

We don't know if and when previous attendees will return.

Church consultant, Thom Rainer
Says, "Don't hold your breath!"

He estimates 20% to 30% will never come back.

Our pre-pandemic attendance averaged around 60.

If the consultant Thom Rainer is correct
We can expect 12 to 18 no returns
Dropping our worship attendance to around 45.

That is about where our attendance is currently.

Could it be that Jesus is dismantling today's church?

Rainer states there were those
Whose attendance has been declining anyway.

The pandemic just pushed them one step further.

He says others saw church life as just one more activity
On an otherwise busy Sunday
The easier activity to drop.

Rainer feels that those who were cultural Christians
Those not overly spiritual
Those that enjoyed the social aspects of the church.

They learned during the pandemic
That it was no big deal to miss church.

And it will be of no consequence for them never to return.

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We shouldn't fret about these losses.

Those who decide to stay away
Really had no plans to be a part of a new future.

Sure, we feel the pain of these losses.

But maybe God is disrupting the church.

Maybe God is giving the church new direction.

Not to be tied to the way things have always been done.

God has placed us in a position to broaden our horizons
In a way that fits where God is leading.

Maybe the church is not dying
As statistics would have us believe.

Maybe God is dismantling the church
So that God can rebuild more aligned with God's vision.

Maybe, with righteous indignation
The Spirit of Jesus is sweeping through today's church.

Reshaping, reforming, renewing, restoring
And redeeming his church.

For Conrad Kanagy

*the decline of the church is ironically the work of God, taking
apart the institutionalized church as we know it. Why so?*

*In order to once again reveal the core of Christian faith:
Jesus.*

May we take heed, pay attention
Be open to the leading of the Spirit

May we be, like Jesus, righteously indignant
At some of the things that are done
Within the confines of Christianity.

Let us help Jesus overturn tables
And scatter the coins.

Jesus is disrupting the church to do a new thing..

Let us hang in there
Because the best is yet to come.

To God be the Glory!!