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John 2:13-25  
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### The Anger of Jesus

Good Morning Church. Today, we welcome Jesus, the dramatic performer. Jesus, who, in all his righteous anger, decries the injustice of the money changers. Jesus who wields a whip and drives us to consider what it means to follow this kind of nonviolent Christ. Do we recognize this Jesus? If so, how do we follow his example?

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our strength and rescuer. Amen.

*Have you ever felt upset about something and needed to do something about it?*

I'm not talking about stewing in fruitless fury. That do-nothing anger of reading the news and stewing in fury at the universe's unfairness. That is like drinking poison and expecting your enemy to die. I've tasted that poison plenty of times in my life and I'm talking about action, productive action. Like the action that Mennonites took, singing hymns of peace in the US Capitol Rotunda and gaining national attention with their arrests. I'm talking about the burning of draft cards during the Vietnam War and the burning of court and debt records during peasant rebellions. This anger does not fight flesh and blood but is against principalities and powers, against the forces of death. A righteous anger that unmask those powers and principalities for what they are.

Today, we are studying the cleansing of the temple from the Gospel of John. An act that shows up after the triumphal entry in the other three gospels, at the end of Jesus's ministry. This story presents a Jesus who challenges our stereotypes of a calm-mannered teacher. And honestly, this story humanizes Jesus. Like Jesus, sometimes we humans get angry. "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

*Have you ever felt upset about something and needed to do something about it?*

Or does Jesus's anger make you uncomfortable? Perhaps you have seen the anger of a man who smashes tables, and this kind of Jesus scares you. For pacifists, Jesus wielding a whip is disturbing. Like the proof text of Jesus saying he came not for peace but a sword. But here is some wisdom I learned in seminary. When a text gives you a pang of disgust or if a text confirms your every preconception. Do not ignore it, it is time to dig deeper.

*Why did Jesus drive out the moneychangers?*

Jewish people would come from across the Mediterranean to visit Jerusalem for the Passover at least once in their lifetime. It would be like one of us visiting Rome or the Holy Land. It would have been an expensive trip. And one thing they feel led to do is to pay the temple tax and sacrifice an animal in thanks for a safe journey. However, these visiting faithful must exchange their foreign money for temple currency. The money changers would happily exchange this for a whole day's wage. This outrageous exchange fee was only made worse by the inflated prices of cattle, sheep, and doves in the temple court. For you see, an animal needs to be perfect, without blemish, to be worthy of sacrifice. So, the animals already there were pre-approved. A little inflated prices make sense; consider restaurants past security in an airport. Something like 10-15% makes sense, but a pre-approved pair of dove--that sacrifice for poor Jews--could cost as much as 15 times as much as an average pair. This is beyond the need to make a profit. This is not selling tamales or eggs for college funds. This is, as Theologian William Barkley says, "bare-faced extortion at the expense of the poor and humble pilgrims, who were practically blackmailed into buying their victims from the Temple booths if they wished to sacrifice at all." William Swartly calls it "gross extortion of the poor."

*Jesus's anger is righteous, but I still preach before a historic peace church about Jesus wielding a whip. Is Jesus's anger justly exercised? Is Jesus being violent?*

The text states, "Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle." Who is the "them?" Swartley argues that the them refers to the sheep and cattle only. This makes sense since a whip is a pastoral tool, something a shepherd would flick so that the tip would break the sound barrier to make a cracking noise to startle cattle into moving. Meanwhile, he overturns tables and verbally tells the dove sellers to leave. And no, I looked but could not find any art showing Jesus doing this. In art, he is always threateningly looming over the money changers and pulling his arm back to strike. So Jesus does flip tables, spills money, and causes a chaotic scene. He may even destroy some property and scatter animals to be lost in the crowd. What do we make of that? Is this violence or not?

*So what do you need to do? What is the unjust system that Jesus is calling you to expose?*

Jesus's act and the examples I gave initially are examples of apocalyptic nonviolence. Not in the sense of the world's end, but apocalyptic in its literal meaning, to reveal, to bring hidden things out in the open. By tipping open the money changers' tins, it was clear how much money they were making off the pilgrims, and by casting out the overpriced animals, he revealed how even a cheap animal could be blemishless. Jesus is being very clever here. Anyone who was there would not need to hear his words or arguments. The point is the symbolic revealing of the injustice of the sacrificial system. What are the symbols of violence and death in our society? One prominent symbol is the gun, especially in visions of Christian nationalism, which envisions

Jesus as holding a gun. An Apocalyptic nonviolence act would be the destruction of guns and turning them into farming tools. Like RA4W tools, a Mennonite group of blacksmiths who accept gun donations and literally forge them into garden mattocks and spades. Will this movement be able to take enough guns off the streets to make a statistical difference, no. The importance is the symbolic act of turning swords into plowshares and the healing of destroying a gun that may have hurt a loved one. I also like to think about the symbolic power of our communion table, which has bullets lodged in the wood.

*So what are you called to expose?*

*What guns do you need to destroy?*

*What tables do you need to flip?*