

Scripture:

John 2:13-21

Anger From the Ashes

Jesus clearing the money changers out of the temple is near the beginning of the gospel of John rather than in the final week of his life as it is with the other gospel writers. Unlike the healing Jesus Mark desires for us to see first John wants us to recognize the prophet. He wants us to notice that God is calling for change and because of that Jesus is going to turn us upside-down to get it.

This angry Jesus cleansing the temple does not fit with the nice Sunday School Jesus most of us prefer. This Jesus seems rather radical and over the top. Perhaps it is because this Jesus is one we can't control or place in our nice golden faith box. And yet if that is the only Jesus we know it is time for us to go back to the scriptures and read them more thoroughly. "Sure, the gospels are about love, but they also include strong words about sin, repentance, judgment, consequences, even hellfire. Just turn to any "red letter" edition of the Bible and you'll discover that Jesus' ministry includes a good dose of holy anger."¹

The Jesus we see in our scriptures today is the one Annie Dilliard describes when she says "On the whole, I do not find Christians, outside of the catacombs, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offence, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return."²

"She's right; Sharon Blezard responds "we Christians are not aware or sufficiently sensible of conditions when it comes to God in any of the three persons of the Trinity. We prefer a small, safe, manageable deity; we hesitate to imagine the God whose sole purpose is to draw us into a relationship so complete that there is precious little room for anything of the other stuff of this world. The God of this week's lectionary readings is expansive, expressive, and wholly unmanageable. To fully experience and approach the God of Moses and the prophets, of Jesus,

¹Longing For Home Lenten Blog <http://www.garypaterson.ca/2015/03/02/longing-for-home-lenten-study-week-three/>

² <http://www.stewardshipoflife.org/2015/03/all-consuming-jesus/>

and of Spirit breath, we must somehow get out of our heads and into our very gut, falling on our faces in the presence of such awe and mystery.”³

What we see from Jesus is what most of us would call righteous anger. Gary Patterson wrote in his Lenten Blog this week “I remember long ago listening to a counsellor describing most anger as a cover emotion for fear and hurt, and that we would do well to get in touch with these underlying feelings before letting loose. I’ve discovered the truth of that all too often.

The counsellor also talked, though, about “righteous anger,” which arises in the face of injustice, that provides energy for challenging the status quo when it is oppressive, for speaking up on behalf of the poor, the marginalized. There’s power in righteous anger... just witness this cleansing of the temple. However, I’ve discovered that this angry energy for justice also needs to be carefully channelled, focussed on creative ends, in the full knowledge of our own mixed motives; for angry righteousness – including our own, maybe especially our own – is always relative, never perfect.”⁴

Jesus is denouncing the many way in which we create God in our own image in our religious systems. “Lest we think this week’s gospel reading has nothing to do with us in 21st century western Christendom, it would be wise to consider what moneychangers exist in our modern congregational edifices. What currency must be exchanged in order to “rightly” worship and enter the community today?” It is so easy for us to loose focus in the church, in all religion. We forget we are called first to “Love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and mind.”

Patterson continues in John “When Jesus is asked to explain his actions, when he is asked for a sign, he responds very strangely – “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Jesus’ listeners think he’s speaking of the literal temple, which has taken 46 years to build. But I wonder if Jesus is challenging the place of the temple in the religious practice of his people. He’s messing with the assumptions of his listeners; de-centering them. It’s not the building that is important; not the rituals, the sacrifice; not the tradition; not the implied permanence and power. It’s relationship with God that is at the heart of it all; that’s what’s important. That’s home.”⁵

One of the reasons I believe we need weekly worship and community is because we often lose our way. We forget that God is calling us forth, we make decisions based on a tame boxed in traditional faith. We ignore the atrocities in our world or even incorporate our cultural norms into faith and worship life. Perhaps today we need to confess that at times holy Anger rises from the ashes.

This week I watched a lament by Ann Voscamp. It was a beautiful video but it was long and focussed on the USA so I took some time adapt it to our conditions. When I heard this prayer I

³ IBID

⁴ Patterson

⁵ IBID

heard the very calls of Jesus in the temple turning the tables. Please take a moment to join me in this visual prayer of repentance.

*A Humble Call

*God is here under our feet
*Absorbing our fears and dreams
The Holy is here* and the foundations of the earth
shake at his voice, our lives are transformed in his presence
And all we can stammer is
*Woe is Me
*for I am one of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a
people of unclean lips.
*Woe to us for shooting and calling to account our wounded
instead of wounding our own pride *and binding up the wounded with grace
Woe to us who have too often fallen into *perfectionism
Which is literal Pharisaism, judgementalism, hyper-individualism,
and materialism, and triumphalism.
*We have held us and the world to a standard of perfection
instead of falling into the only thing that can ever,
*forever hold any of us - God's arms of grace.
*Woe to us!
with our full plates while every 3.6 seconds another person
*stops breathing because they died of hunger
died of an empty plate.
*Forgive us for the 1 billion people who live in poverty
who live every one of their days in suffering poverty
*forgive us for not caring for the orphan and the widow.
but caring more about looking like we are *keeping up with the Jones
*because you say faith like this is a sham, a fake, a fraud.
*Woe to us!
For our culpability in a world where
*80 people own the same amount as the poorest half of the world.
Where 80 individuals own as much as 3.5 billion people on the planet.
Forgive us for living apathetically in a world *where there are more slaves today than ever
before in history.
More than 29 million people live in slavery and less than 1 in 100 are ever rescued.
When our *clothing, *our chocolate, *our coffee, our smartphones, depend on slave labour.
Producing these goods cheaply so we have more *money in our wallets
regardless of how much life and soul it costs anyone else.
Woe to Us
*for our responsibility in systemic racism
in a country where four percent of our population is Aboriginal

and yet 23.2 percent of those in prison are of that very race.
Where there has been a 40 percent increase in the last decade of the incarcerated Aboriginal population.

*Woe to us

as a culture who prides what we see in mirrors more than
what You, God, see in our hearts.

*A country that spends billions of dollars a year on
face lifts, botox injections and unnecessary aesthetic cosmetic augmentations,
on diets, and special eating plans *while much of the world is literally dying
for the luxury to choose what they eat,

*And when \$12 billion would eliminate illiteracy in five years.

\$15 billion would solve the world's water and sanitation issues

*Forgive us God for caring more about our faces, then facing Your Face.

Woe to Us!

*Who are created for peace but live angry, *violent lives in angry violent countries. We dress
our fears up like anger to do the unexplainable
instead of asking for a *shattering of all violence with your shock and awe grace.

*Forgive us as a church for lavish buildings, instead of lavish love,

*for offensive arrogance and judgment instead of *offensive grace,

for wanting to *climb ladders to be somebody instead of climbing lower to help somebody.

*Forgive us for pointing out sins in others and refusing to see the sins in our own hearts, for
having more time for *Facebook than we do for Face time in Your Book, *Forgive us for
wanting callings other than what you have created us for.

*for feeding our fears to be bigger than our faith,

for not making our humility bigger than any of our platforms,

*for thinking we could claim you as our God but be silent about You and your kingdom.

Forgive us for carrying around our trendy *coffee cups instead of carrying our cross and pouring
our lives right out in love.

Forgive us for wanting to be the *greatest of all rather than wanting to be the greatest servant of
all.

For wanting to be first in everything instead of *returning to our first love.

Forgive us for suiting up in our armour of *negativity because we aren't brave enough to
believe, and surrender to the courage of vulnerability.

Forgive us for playing in *procrastination and not being people of action, for loitering about in
little and trite things when there is a world to be saved with your *love, and mercy and grace.

Forgive us for not loving the *marginalized when You told us that it's in the margins that You
write the greatest Words.

Forgive us for loving our *agendas instead of interrupting our agendas because we Love You.

*Forgive us who have loved so little because we have loved ourselves so much.

*If we sought God's face and lived Holy love every day then we might heal our *land and all
our broken hearts.

*In the nearness of our union, in our face to face sacred communion

our souls are seen, *our fears and our tears are touched, our short-comings are caught in this
falling into*God's burning love rising from the ashes of our world.

If we'd let our hurting places intersect with God's redemptive love, if we'd let the *wounded
healer bind our wounds, take our unspoken brokenness and give us *unconditional wholeness,
let the scent of relentless love wake us to more,

God will feast with us and *we will rise. Out of the dark, and ashes all can rise
we can rise If we choose love, If we choose mercy, If we choose grace, If we allow for the
resurrection in our lives and world.

Amen.*

New Life rising forth from the ashes is what Jesus is all about. Faith "It's about that untamed,
mysterious, radical son of man who demands us to be completely consumed by him and to
consume him completely in word and sacrament. It's about falling wholly in love with the wild
wholly Other. It's to be swept off our feet by the risen Christ and fully focused on following him.

Branding, innovating, reframing, and reimagining church is not necessarily a bad thing; in fact, it
is necessary to measure how we're doing in communicating the good news and equipping God's
people, but being church is not so much about marketing and metrics as it is about faithful
discipleship. You can bet your last goat or turtledove that when we do get sidetracked, the all-
consuming Jesus will start turning over a few tables and discomfoting the comfortable.

Be ready. Be prepared. Put on those crash helmets and expect a miracle. To do less is to try to
stuff Jesus back into the box, and trust me; he's not having any of that."⁶

⁶ Blezard