

Whitehorse Uniting Church
Sunday 3 March 2024
Lent 3 B



Hymn 179 Praise with joy

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLZszh-wFz0>

Welcome

All are welcome in the presence of the Divine one. We are invited by grace to share in love together. So come. Be still for a time. Listen. Respond.

Acknowledgement

As we gather, we acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and these waters. We pay respect to their elders past, present and emerging. As First and Second Peoples walking together, we commit ourselves to be people of the covenant, listening, truth telling and seeking justice for all.

Call to Worship

To the “self-made” person the message of Christ crucified is a stumbling block.

***Lord, keep me, your servant, from arrogance,
don't permit it have dominion over me.***

To the intellectual snob the cross is just religious nonsense.

***Lord, keep me, your servant, from arrogance,
don't permit it have dominion over me.***

O God, our rock and our salvation,
no person sees all their own errors,
free me from those faults I hide from myself.

***Let the words of our mouths
and the things we mull over in our heads,
be acceptable in your sight,
O God, our strength and our redeemer.***

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Prayer: “Another Way”

Teach us the courage, O God, to turn from what seems so natural, so safe:
the way of grasping power, and befriending the powerful,
in the hope of protection and security.

Teach us the humility, O God, to turn from what is so enticing, so persuasive:
the way of accumulating things, and trusting in wealth,
in the hope of comfort and life.

Lead us, O God, in another way, the way of true security, true wealth,
the way of Christ, the servant, the way of weakness and simplicity.

Lead us, O God, in another way, the way of caring for the neglected,
feeding the hungry, housing the homeless,
protecting the threatened, and challenging the powerful,
the foolish way of the Gospel, that brings salvation to all. Amen

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Hymn 349 In the cross

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfZgP1c_6Js

Bible Readings:

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

The message about the cross sounds like a lot of mindless cock-and-bull to those who have thrown their lot in with this present world order and are going down with the ship. But to those of us who are being saved from that, it is nothing less than the power of God! God spoke about this in the Scriptures:

“I will expose the brilliant insights of your experts and the wise counsel of your gurus; I will expose them for what they really are, a load of codswallop!”

So where are the intellectuals now? Where are the religious experts? Where are those who have an answer for everything? What have they got to show for all their cleverness now that God has turned all the conventional wisdom on its head and made it look foolish? Seeing that no amount of human cleverness had ever woken anybody up to God’s ways, God made the wise decision to use something that seemed utterly foolish to everyone — our preaching! — to rescue those who would trust the message. Most people want something more than this. Those with a religious world view demand to see miraculous signs to prove that it is from God. Those with a modern rational world view insist that it should have to prove its intellectual credibility. But what we are preaching is a Messiah who was strung up and killed. The religious people find this unthinkable, and the intellectuals regard it as primitive nonsense; but to those who have heard the call of God, whatever their background, it is the ultimate good news of God’s chosen one — as miraculous and profound as one could ever wish for! When it’s all said and done, the sum total of the human race’s intellectual achievements don’t even begin to stack up against the foolishness of God; and the combined force of all the world’s powers is puny in comparison to the weakness of God.

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John 2:13-22

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Jesus travelled up to Jerusalem shortly before the Jewish religious festival known as Passover. He walked into the Temple and found people selling the cattle, sheep and pigeons required for the religious sacrifices. He also saw the money changers seated at their tables supplying the required currency for the temple taxes. Jesus grabbed a length of rope and, wielding it like a stock-whip, drove them all out of the Temple and trashed their stalls. It was bedlam, with cattle and sheep going in all directions and coins spilling everywhere as he kicked over the money changer’s tables and shouted at those selling the pigeons, saying, “Get those things out of here. Stop treating my Father’s house like a shopping mall!”

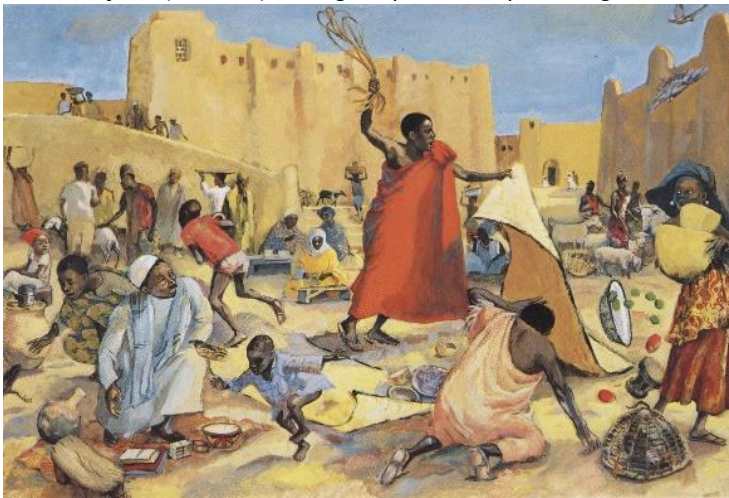
It reminded his followers of the passage of scripture that says, “I will be consumed by passion for your house.”

The Jewish authorities were soon on the scene demanding to know whether he could produce any evidence that his actions were authorised. Jesus answered them, “Tear down this temple, and in three days I will raise it back up.”

The authorities snorted, “The construction of this temple has taken forty-six years, and it’s still not finished. Are you so out-of-your-tree that you think you could rebuild it in three days?”

Of course, Jesus was really describing his own body as the new temple. After he had been raised from the dead, his followers remembered that he had said this, and it reinforced their belief in the words of scripture and in the words spoken by Jesus.

© Peter Winfried (Canisius) Koenig, "Christ Overturns the Tables of the Moneylenders", from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=58520> [retrieved February 27, 2024]. Original source: Peter Winfried (Canisius) Koenig, <https://www.pwkoenig.co.uk/>.



Sermon by Rev Peter

© JESUS MAFA, "Jesus drives out the merchants", from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=48271> [retrieved February 27, 2024]. Original source: <http://www.librairie-emmanuel.fr> (contact page: <https://www.librairie-emmanuel.fr/contact>)

When I was a school chaplain, I would at times be walking through the corridors of the school where I ministered. Sometimes I would see and hear a teacher bawling out a student who the teacher saw as behaving badly. The teacher's anger was evident in their tone, volume and body language.

In this context I remember a group of year 7 girls walking with me. One of the students said, "You know Mr Cannon, we hate it when a teacher gets angry with a student who is naughty." I asked why? They replied, "because we are frightened the teacher will then be angry with us."

The students' comments gave me pause. I had till then seen and heard teachers use anger as a method to manage the behaviour of the students. The comments helped me see how anger is like swinging a sledgehammer in a china shop.

This is not to say anger does not have its place nor are we to sit in judgement of when we feel anger. Anger after all is a normal emotion. It arises as a result of other underlying emotions. Like other normal emotions, it needs to be expressed and heard. Healthy anger will often find expression in non-destructive ways.

And of course, I have heard many sermons speaking of expressing a "righteous anger", particularly in the context of injustice and oppression. Unfortunately, our story told here of Jesus "cleansing the Temple", is often used to justify the expression and argument for "righteous anger". Yet none of the Gospel writers who tell this story (in various ways and contexts), describe Jesus as being angry.

To see the story as an illustration of Jesus being angry both misses the point and imposes our own bias upon the story.

They all speak of his zeal and passion for the Temple. And John uses this story to set the stage for the commencement of Jesus' ministry. The story lays out Jesus' authority right at the start and foreshadows his death and resurrection.

Matthew uses the story to reveal what the coming reign of God will look like. The money changers and merchants are displaced by the poor, the sick and the marginalized who are then taught about the reign of God. There is an echo of the fulfilment of the Beatitudes.

In the telling of the story, each of the Gospel writers invite us to pause and listen. To not come to the story with our preconceptions about emotions, anger and righteousness. Nor are we to sit in judgement of any of the characters in the story.

Instead, we are invited to set those preconceptions aside to notice what God is doing in Jesus. For John is clear, the actions of Jesus are a sign. The sign's role is to point to something of significance. And for John, the signs invite us into a journey of faith, a faith that is life giving.

Again in this season of Lent, we are invited to pause, listen and notice. Yes, to notice what the story points to but also see the movement of God's Spirit around and in us. We need eyes to see and ears to listen.

Why? Because we are invited to respond in faith, a faith that is life-giving for us and those we encounter along the journey.

Pause and reflect for a quiet moment with a Prayer by Bruce Prewer

THE TABLE

Lord of simplicity,
cement the legs of your Table
into the rock floor of my little house of faith;
then,
should the bailiffs of contemporary doubt
arrive at my door with their bullying ways
to dispossess me of my religious furniture
and cushioned comforts,
there will remain that one altar of love,
where I may place a roll of bread and cup of wine
and I will know that all is well
and all manner of things will be well.

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Hymn 674 Inspired by love and anger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bp2bsBelbUA>

Offering Prayer

***Out of the fullness of your gifts, O God,
we make this offering
and dedicate our lives anew
in following the way of Jesus,
encouraged by the Holy Spirit.
Let your foolishness be our wisdom;
your weakness be our strength. Amen.***

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Prayers of the people (Tim Joyce)

Our Lord and Our God,
Give us all that leads us to you.
Take away from us, all that separates us from you.
Take us away from ourselves and offer us entirely to you.
Lord - We pray for Your Church
We pray for our Whitehorse congregation
For patience, for clarity, for understanding, for wisdom, for unity
We pray for those who lead us and for the ministries formal and informal, seen and unseen that our people undertake.
We pray for Your church in all its forms and all its places
We pray for their worship communities, their members, their participants, their special ministries and their outreach programs
For all the work that is done in Your name
Merciful Lord - We pray for the world
The world as your love would have it:
where the weak are protected, and none go hungry or poor;
where the riches of creation are shared
where different races and cultures live in harmony and mutual respect;

where peace is built with justice, and justice is guided by Your love.

Give us the strength and courage to be agents of Your love

Merciful Lord - We pray for the poor, neglected and marginalised.

For those who are struggling to make ends meet

For those who have very little

For the hungry and the homeless

For those sleeping in cars in shopping centre car parks

– for those we see and for those we don't

We pray for indigenous people,

For the displaced

Lord we pray for victims of war – those who have lost their home, their livelihood, their brother or sister, their neighbour, their wife, their husband, their child, their humanity.

For aid workers

For those who seek to ease the suffering of those around them in whatever way they can

For leaders

For the international community

For perpetrators of war

Lord - Fill their hearts with Your love – we pray

Lord bring an end to the suffering

We pray for peace

We pray for justice

Give us the strength and courage (and the opportunity) to be agents of Your love

Merciful Lord - We pray for those in special need at this time

For the sick the lonely and the grieving

We pray for those in our own community, family, loved ones and friends who are suffering hardship, loss or ill health.

Lord - We entrust them to your care and pray that you will surround them with your love.

We pray all these things through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray ...

Our Father in heaven

Hallowed be Your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done

On earth, as it is in heaven

Give us today our daily bread

And forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us

Save us from the time of trial

And deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours

Now and for ever

Amen

COMMUNION

Invitation

In the midst of all the uncertainties of life, we are assured of the Divine embrace as we gather around this table. So come, be still, allow the Divine embrace to comfort, heal and inspire. For this embrace is one of love for you and all of creation.

May the grace and peace of Jesus be with you.

And also with you. (pass the peace)

Prayer

In accepting the invitation to be still,

we focus on you O God.

In accepting the invitation to be still,

We respond in appreciation and thanksgiving.

There is simplicity in gathering around bread and wine but deep significance in the grace we experience.

In this encounter, there is wisdom.

These simple things point to stories which stir our hearts as we remember.

And we remember the stories of Jesus, the teachings, the experiences, the sufferings and the joys.

In these, there is wisdom.

And we give thanks for the nourishment provided, joining with creation saying:

***Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.***

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

Together we are lifted into joy and hope, for new beginnings are given to us. Yes, in your Divine presence there is life. And we are embraced by wisdom.

Bless these sacraments of grace, to break open Jesus' life of love...

...to pour into us Jesus' love of life.

May then we as your people be transformed into signs and celebrations of your all-embracing love.

The breaking of the bread

The bread we break is a sharing in the body of Christ.

The cup we take is a sharing in the blood of Christ.

The gifts of God for the people of God

The distribution

Prayer after Communion and Final Blessing

We have received your love. May we share your love. We have received grace. May we be bearers of grace. We go as bearers of your Spirit of life, love and hope. We go as blessings to all with whom we meet and share. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen

Hymn 779 May the feet of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU&list=PL5dbbdzyKBag-mEd9qTgdyYNQLIsLD2rC&index=40>