

Sermon on Luke 19: 40 – 20:8 preached on Sunday 12 July 2020

We've heard David's intimate conversation with God about building a temple: one of the stories in the NT reading is about Jesus cleansing the temple, so we can guess the Temple is a central theme, but there's several familiar other stories here, too. Essentially, they revolve around Jesus as King, and what sort of kingdom and kingship he has, the same question which the religious leaders ask him at the end of the reading .

People are streaming up to Jerusalem for Passover from all over the country, for the major festival of the religious calendar - the atmosphere is starting to buzz with excitement. **Jesus is headed to Jerusalem, too** (28), a journey that takes him via Jericho, where he has tea with Zaccheus, who's lately been seen up a tree, and happily now enters the Kingdom of God through the grace extended to him in Jesus. **As Jesus goes along**, aware that that religious leaders are circling him, like hyenas around a prey, aware that the leaders are within earshot. he tells the (pointed) story of the servants given talents or pounds (about three months' wage for a labourer), and what they did or didn't do discharge their responsibilities. **As Jesus arrives at the brow of the hill overlooking the great city** and the brook of Kidron, Jesus weeps. He sees what's going to happen to himself, his people in their rejection of him, and the eventual downfall of the city. 'If only you'd recognised what makes for peace!' (41) - if only you'd listened. If only the scales would fall off your eyes, and you could see that the time (Kairos time, God's time) is now, the Kingdom of God is here!

Just as the prophets of old (e.g. Hosea) lived the message they brought to the children of Israel, Jesus lives out his visual aid to the people. **To signal** to all those watching what sort of King he is, he sends his disciples to find a young ass or donkey. No fine black steed with shining saddle or trappings, no glinting armour or army – just a humble, working man's **donkey**, used to carry produce to market, to ride on into Jerusalem. **Word spreads like wildfire**, and the people are soon pulling down branches off the palm trees and waving them, shouting 'Hosanna' (once, 'save us', now a shout of joy), throwing their cloaks down to make a poor man's red carpet. **'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'** The crowds have huge expectations of him as saving their nation, liberating them from their oppressors: this is what they understood the Messiah would do. But Jesus comes humbly, to save not only his people, but those excluded by the old way of doing things, that excluded people like Zaccheus, or even salvation to those completely outside the pale, Gentiles, **you and me**. He brings no sword, but soon, will be nailed to a cross. Soon the crowds will turn and be shouting, 'Crucify him!'. **The opposition is immediate**. The Pharisees reprimand Jesus (39), 'Tell your people to shut up!', afraid of repercussions from the authorities, and the religious leaders plot to kill him (48). Jesus doesn't try to quiet the crowds – 'if they were quiet, even the stones would cry out!' (40).

He goes to the Temple, symbol of God's presence among his people, symbol of God at peace with his people through the system of sacrifices, and his actions seem extreme. But this is not the first

time that a succession of prophets through Israel's history have scolded the people for straying from the path of righteousness, of offering empty sacrifices without truly seeking God in their hearts and lives. There was a constant tendency of doing 'the necessary', fulfilling the letter of the religious demands without any internal spring-cleaning. So Jesus does the spring-cleaning of the Temple for them, throwing out all the commercial activities that have sprung up in the court of the Gentiles – the only place foreigners could come to worship God.

It's as if the religious leaders are powerless to stop this divine force of cleansing. As if it is actually **they**, not Jesus, who have to pluck up courage to ask him on whose authority he does what he does. He throws a question back to them: 'By what authority did John baptise – from heaven or of human origin?' This is a two-edged sword, and they know it. John prepared the way for the Messiah to come, and here the Messiah is, plain to see, but they don't want to see it, or openly acknowledge it. They know that if they say John was just a man, the crowds will leap on them, as the crowds, at the moment, believe, at the very least, that John was a prophet. They are struck dumb. They can't reply. Jesus, almost mocking them, 'cannot tell either'.

It is telling, that Jesus immediately after this exchange tells a parable about a vineyard and those caring for it. He knows, and his hearers know, that the vineyard has long been a symbol of the people of Israel. Those sent to the vineyard by the owner to check on its condition and productivity, only to find things in rack and ruin, are killed by those supposedly caring for the vineyard. 'Perhaps if I send my only beloved son, they will listen to him'. Luke is the only gospel writer to add the 'beloved'. Jesus is explicitly using that title as his own. Sadly, we know, and Jesus knew then, as the Passion narrative gains momentum in the following days, that the **Only Son** will be killed as well. By this end, the Temple that David longed to build and the accompanying system of sacrifices will end, no longer necessary, because of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice. **'For he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed'**. Paul says in **1 Cor 3: 16** **'don't you know you are God's temple, where the Spirit of God dwells'**. The 'you' is personal *and* collective. **The Body of Christ, God's dwelling place. Let's not limit God's people, the Kingdom of God, to one particular place, or one particular group, but see it limitless, joined by the Spirit, worldwide.**

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