

REFLECTION – March 7

Carol: Again and again Jesus shows us the way. Jesus is passionate in a big way in today's scripture reading!

Jeff: He's passionate in a BIG place!

Carol: Jesus and his disciples are in the temple in Jerusalem during the festival of Passover.

Jeff: The original temple, built under the rule of King Solomon had been destroyed about 600 years earlier. A second temple had been built...and then, centuries later, with the city under Roman occupation prior to the birth of Jesus, King Herod decided on a 'major' temple building project... which is what brings Jesus to a BIG place!

Carol: Esther and Emmett talked about the temple being the size of about 20 football stadiums.

Jeff: And with all kinds of separate sections -

Carol: And it was a busy place – birds and animals were sacrificed as offerings to God, so there was an area for the butchering.

Jeff: And there were places for the exchange of currency, and a market area where people could purchase a dove or animal to have sacrificed as an offering.

Carol: So, when we read about Jesus overturning the tables of the moneychangers, grabbing handfuls of coins and scattering them about on the ground, grabbing some rope and using it as a whip to drive out the sheep and cattle – it sounds like a major commotion...

Jeff: Yet given the enormity of the temple area, probably not many people would have been aware of it when it was actually happening. And the temple was so large that Jesus could have disappeared into the crowds of Passover pilgrims.

Carol: But word would have spread. People would have talked about the prophet (p-r-o-p-h-e-t) from Nazareth who tossed temple profit (p-r-o-f-i-t) on the ground.

Jeff: And those who could barely afford to buy a dove would have tried to scoop up as much of these coins – this manna from heaven - as they could.

Carol: Imagine the disruption as cows and sheep ran into the crowds and then began wandering around amongst people.

Jeff: And Temple officials ran around, asking people if they had seen any cows or sheep running by!!! – then trying to round them up.

Carol: More seriously, word of what had happened would have reached the temple guards and the numerous Roman soldiers stationed there during the Passover festival – a festival that remembered the Hebrews escape from slavery in Egypt and coming to the land God gave into their care.

Jeff: Jesus' actions might have reminded people of former prophets who declared that God was not pleased by temple sacrifices.

Carol: Yes. Isaiah said that God had had enough of burnt offerings; that what God wanted was for people to learn to do good; to seek justice; to rescue the oppressed and share with the poor.

Jeff: And Micah said that God wants us to seek justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God.

Carol: So maybe Jesus meant this as a symbolic action in this place where people were divided – segregated – from each other.

Jeff: Maybe Jesus turned tables in the market area where people were 'fleeced' to buy fleece – where if they did not have an animal to be sacrificed, they had to pay whatever the temple merchants wanted to charge.

Carol: Coming to the temple could be costly!

Jeff: And Jesus had a point to make about that.

Carol: Prophets had always engaged in symbolic acts to make a point. Remember, God told Isaiah to spend three years walking around barefoot and naked as a sign that the people of Egypt and Cush would be conquered and lose everything.

Jeff: It was a kind of street theatre to make a point.

Carol: So maybe what Jesus did in the temple was prophetic street theatre, to say to everyone that God wanted to break down the barriers and allow everyone to know that they all belonged in God's love.

Jeff: Jesus referred to himself as the new temple, God's love, God's invitation to healing and to reconciled-and-just-relations was embodied in his compassion for the poor, and the outcasts and the oppressed.

Carol: Jesus chose a big place to make a big statement about God's big love.

Jeff: The story reminds us that God is always calling us to challenge existing structures that divide; calling us to upset tables, or rock a few boats, in order to awaken people to new possibilities of peace and compassion and the inclusion of everyone in a God-shaped society.

Carol: Again and again, Jesus shows us the way to God's love, to God's vision for this world and for humanity. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Jeff: And Amen!