

## Title: The Temple of Our Hearts: Cleansing, Resurrection, and the Wisdom of the Cross

### Introduction:

Today, we delve into the profound message we just heard in the Gospel of John, particularly in the cleansing of the temple, coupled with the wisdom of the cross as articulated by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians. These passages offer us invaluable insights into the nature of faith, the cleansing of our hearts, the promise of resurrection, and the peril of idolatry, especially in light of the handing down of the commandments by Moses.

### I. Cleansing the Temple (John 2:13-25)

In the narrative of John, we witness Jesus entering the temple courts, only to find them filled with the commerce and clamour of the marketplace. He braids cords into a whip and drives out the merchants, overturning tables and declaring, "Stop turning my Father's house into a market!" (John 2:16, NIV). This act of cleansing holds profound symbolism beyond its literal context.

A. Cleansing Our Hearts: Just as Jesus cleansed the physical temple, so does he seek to cleanse the temple of our hearts. Our hearts can become cluttered with distractions, worldly desires, and impurities that hinder our communion with God. We are all called as part of our Lenten journey to allow Jesus into the temple of our hearts. This is to let the overturning of the tables of greed, selfishness, and hubris so that we may be vessels of his love and grace.

### II. The Prophecy of Resurrection (John 2:19-22)

Following the cleansing of the temple, Jesus cryptically speaks of his own body as the temple that will be destroyed and raised again in three days. This enigmatic statement points towards the ultimate sign of resurrection, foreshadowing Christ's victory over death.

A. The Hope of Resurrection: Just as Jesus promised resurrection for himself, so does he promise resurrection for all who believe in him. The resurrection is not merely a future event but a present reality transforming our lives here and now. In moments of despair and darkness, let us cling to the hope of resurrection, knowing that Christ has conquered sin and death and that we are called to share in his victory.

### III. The Idolatry of Money (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul contrasts the wisdom of God with the wisdom of the world, highlighting the folly of human wisdom in the face of the cross. In a society obsessed with wealth and status, Paul's words ring true as a warning against the idolatry of money. The longest of the ten words or commandments expressly details the dangers of idolatry or the worship of false gods. This lies at the heart of Jesus' condemnation at the Temple and the fundamental question behind the setting up the Temple Market.

### IV One of Four Common Gospel stories: this one is different.

For Mark, Luke, and Matthew, this event occurred before the arrest of Jesus. For John, a spiritual writer, this is the second sign pointing to Jesus's presence as the promised one. The prophecy will be fulfilled in the Passover, but not yet. One of the things that stands out for me is the manner and reason behind the cleansing.

In the synoptics M, M and L, we hear Jesus answer the question about paying taxes. "Whose image is it?" is a very loaded question. Most coins in everyday circulation had the head of Tiberius on one side. Some smaller coins, such as the Widow's Mite, had natural imagery but no human. This is where the danger of using Roman coinage in the Temple was alarming. Tiberius was a self-proclaimed Son of God. To offer his image in tribute to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel contravened the commandments of making a "graven image" and "offering that which is idolatry."

I am instead taken with the image of Jesus sitting in the forecourt of the Temple, watching. What must people have thought when they saw him with leather cords and three strands braiding it into a whip? Once he arose, his first act was to release the cattle and sheep. You can imagine the panic that was created. The Temple forecourt had become a one-stop religious supply shop. Buy your unblemished animals here! Profiteering was rife. As were the money exchangers.

Where I am staying, in settling the bill, I was informed that there would be a surcharge on my card. It was only \$1, but you will see percentages in some places. It may be 2.8%, others, 1%. We argued about this at Gisborne when introducing contactless paying in the Op Shops during COVID. The Parish was given a substantive donation to cover the surcharge, so all was well. The other argument was, "The volunteers are too old to learn how to do this." To the surprise of the nay-sayers, the volunteers love it. They don't have to use the cumbersome till. The Parish borrows it for other events. I'm one who seldom carries cash – for a variety of reasons. I love it, too!

But a word on idolatry and money. Too often in the Church, when it comes to money and fundraising, we don't like to talk about it. I don't either, to be honest, but we exist in the world. Relying on the shared plate, tithes, and fundraising is good, but the silence about our actions can border on idolatry. "I don't want you to know what I'm giving" was a long-held practice in the Church. The envelopes scheme, only one person knowing the numbers, etc. That's not bad, but I'd like to make my cord today and pose a question.

Two things stood out when I first saw St Peters by the Lake. One was a familiar form of uplighting from his Mercedes holding his alb, freshly returning from the Abbey, and then the fundraising thermometer.

In light of the cracker of a sermon Bishop Richard preached on Tuesday night and his emphasis on reimagining the role of the Parish Priest and, in turn, the Parish, I'd like to remind you of the three "W" that Bishop Richard highlighted.

Witness, Watch, Weave.

Reflecting on this in light of today's gospel, the spiritual moment of cleansing and prophecy are all at play by the presence of Jesus in the Temple. Witnessing the injustice of the temple and the semantic games played in terms of the temple coinage, Jesus was very much a presence in the Temple. As a rabbi, he taught and taught with authority. He then watched, observing and contemplating how to engage with the community. And the weaving, he breathed God's justice into the house of prayer. Physically, he wove a whip out of three leather strands, unloosing the livestock before turning his attention to the trade tables.

A personal aside here: I've always wanted to use "unloosed" in a sermon, and I found the perfect opportunity for the first time in thirty years! Why does this tickle my fancy? In Koine Greek, there is only one regular verb: lou-oh! I loose, you loose, we loose! If there is only one regular verb, I don't know how that is defined, but at last, I can now say that in terms of Greek, I am finally regular!

Please excuse my warped sense of humour!

So, back to witnessing, watching and weaving. A challenge for us is to be able to re-invent and even re-pitch our tent in this vibrant and important community. As people drive past, as I observed with Fr. Jeff's imposing presence in front of the Church, what are people thinking as they observe the expansion? Do they know what we are up to? Do they care? Are they curious? Let's redefine our witnessing, watching, and weaving and let them know. In doing so, we take the mystery and sense of what they do and make it why we are doing it.

Let's hang out a sign and tell the people what we're doing. "Expanding our entrance, improving access for all, hospitality enhances, and room for you and your friends, and a pony! Come and see!" (adding a QR code to the bottom so they can share some of their joy and wealth).

Jesus was challenging the prevailing attitude that put prosperity into financial terms instead of walking hand in hand with God and allowing God to protect them with prayer in the temple and daily life. It was the dishonesty and misdirection towards serving mammon that made him angry. What may have been a good idea once of providing for the many pilgrims when they arrived soon gave way to greed and avarice. The financial change in exchange was justified, but the exploitation was not.

In the future, if we turn the story around to "we're doing this because..." it makes a difference. We are making the house of God more accessible and a place of an inclusive community. You are welcome to our hospitality and prayerful times, and in turn, if you would like to join us in this

ministry, let's talk. And you talk first. If you want to kill their enthusiasm, introduce them to the clergy to do the talking! I'm here to lead spiritually and work with you on knowing, living and loving the gospel, justice and mercy, and making this an exceptional house of God.

Fear not, I'm not good at making whips! But I am very much aware of the power of the cross and the need more than ever to proclaim it, with you, to the world in which we live.

A. The Wisdom of the Cross: The cross is a stark reminder of God's wisdom, which confounds the world's wisdom. In a culture that values power and prestige, the cross appears as a weakness, yet it is through the cross that God reveals his true power and love. Let us resist the temptation to prioritise worldly wealth and instead embrace the wisdom of the cross, which calls us to humility, selflessness, and sacrificial love.

Conclusion:

As we reflect on the cleansing of the temple, the promise of resurrection, and the wisdom of the cross, may we be inspired to cultivate hearts that are pure, hopeful, and aligned with God's wisdom. Let us heed Jesus' call to cleanse the temple of our hearts, to embrace the hope of resurrection, and to forsake the idolatry of money. As in the early Church, we share what we have. In the building of God's kingdom, this includes the wealth of love, hospitality, financial responsibility and companionship. As we do so, may we become faithful disciples who bear witness to the transformative power of God's love in the world. Amen.