

Lent 3, 2015. John 2: 13-22 St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland. WA Nigel Taber-Hamilton

We hear the story of Jesus and the money-changers at least every year. It's easy to see it as part of the background to Jesus' relationship with religious authority. Much ink has been spilt explaining why Jesus acted the way he did.

I'm more interested, not in the "why" but in "the way" Jesus acted that day. From him this is violence on an unprecedented scale – it's a shocking picture of someone described as the Prince of Peace. And its perpetrated against individuals who are just trying to get by, who are providing a valuable service.

Jesus roars! He overturns tables! Other peoples' property and livelihood treated with utter contempt. Not only that, he makes a genuine, honest-to-goodness whip! AND he uses it. You could argue that, well, we know Jesus; he didn't actually intend to harm anyone. But that's not the picture we're looking at here. This is white-hot rage. What must the bystanders have thought?

Justified? Was it justified? Is anger ever justified? Where is the forgiveness seventy times seven? What about turning the other cheek. One thing is clear: there's a back-story (and we know some of it) – Jesus perceived the Temple system as an affront to his faith and an attack on it. Should we judge Jesus? God alone is the judge, remember – though in this case that might just be a little self-serving!

Last Tuesday I lost my temper at the vestry meeting. I'd like to be able to say that it was justified, that there were some "moneychangers" present who needed to have their "tables" overturned.

Whatever others might say, I can't say that of myself. What I can say is that I didn't get much sleep on Tuesday night, and that I made a lot of apologetic phone calls on Wednesday morning.

As we continue our journey through Lent this has been, for me, a reminder of the side of this season that most of us would rather forget - that human beings are imperfect; that we are imperfect....well, perhaps I shouldn't say "we," just "I." I'm not going to speak for all of you! I have to say when I read the psalm in preparation for today I thought "secret faults?!" Hardly secret.

As Ronald Knox has said, "Through-out two thousand years of history, Christians, both whole churches and individual believers, have consistently been able to ignore many of Jesus' key commandments and invitations. We have either been too weak to follow his counsels or we have rationalized them away in some way."

Perhaps it's human nature, but it seems to me that, to a large extent, we routinely exempt ourselves – I routinely exempt myself – from the demand to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek when attacked, to forgive 70 times 7, to leave our gift at the altar and first go and seek reconciliation with our brother or sister before we worship, to place justice on the same level as worship, to see mercy as more important than doctrine, to not commit adultery, to not steal, to not call someone a fool, to not tell lies, to not give in to jealousy. We have – I have – in virtually

every one of these areas – individually and collectively – a history of infidelity and rationalization.

The older I get, the more I see how blind I am to my own hypocrisies and how weak and rationalizing is my human nature. I don't always know when I'm rationalizing, or biased, or following Christ properly. And, even when I do, I don't always have the strength or will to do what I know is right.

There is one place I can go where I know for certain that I can be faithful to one of Jesus' commands, where I know I will be accepted, where I know that forgiveness is possible, where I know that fellowship is certain, where I know that love is real. *It's Here*. And by "here" I'm not only thinking about the physicality of this place and of each of you – I'm thinking about the command to "do this in remembrance of me" – where, together we share in "eucharisto," in giving thanks, in breaking bread and sharing in wine.

This is not just about bread and wine: there are deep realities here; this moment we share is a container for profound truths about ourselves and our common faith. Here we experience the incarnation of God in history; here we encounter God's physical embrace in the arms of each other; here our human community is united in mystic bond with the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1), here we receive God's gift of reconciliation and forgiveness; here we receive the new manna which God gives to nurture God's people, here we share in the great banquet feast.

This is our family meal together as believers. This is an invitation to a deeper discipleship; it is where we meet Jesus.

For me, there are other reasons to be here: This is the one place where I know I can be faithful, where I can essentially measure up. Outside of here I know that I can't always control how I feel or how I think, I can't always measure up morally and spiritually, but, inside of my perpetual human inadequacy and occasional doubt and confusion, I can be faithful in this one deep way.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the great Lutheran priest and martyr, used to include in his pre-marital counseling, something like this: "right now, you are in love and you believe that your love can sustain your marriage. It can't. But your marriage can sustain your love!"

The ritual that we call a wedding and the thing it creates is more than a moment in time, more than feelings between two people, it's a ritual container that holds a couple together over the long haul.

The Eucharist is also a ritual container; it can hold communities together over the long haul. I know – and experienced last week the truth – that I can't sustain my faith, love, forgiveness, and hope by my own strength of will. Nor can you. But we can sustain them through the Eucharist.

I can't always be clear-headed or warm-hearted; I can't always be sure that I know the exact path of God; I don't always measure up morally and humanly to what faith asks of me. And nor do you.

But we can be faithful in this one, deep way: We can come here to the Eucharist regularly. Because here we find strength for the journey, here community is re-created, here we are forgiven; here we meet Jesus. This is the Lenten Journey, but it's more than that: it's the journey of life, the pilgrims' common journey, the journey home to God.

