

## Reflection for the Third Sunday of Lent

### *Jesus Cleanses the Temple*

*<sup>13</sup> The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. <sup>15</sup> Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. <sup>16</sup> He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' <sup>18</sup> The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' <sup>19</sup> Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' <sup>20</sup> The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' <sup>21</sup> But he was speaking of the temple of his body. <sup>22</sup> After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:13-22)*

My guess is that I'm not the only one who has used these times of lockdown to do a bit of decluttering. Not that it's been very successful because charity shops have been closed so I haven't been able to manage the essential stage which is to get rid of those things which are no longer useful or relevant to my life. Actually, reluctantly, I've had to admit that an awful lot of what I've got is not really at all important in the grand scheme of things. On the other hand, it's been a joy to find one or two items which mean a lot to me but which had completely disappeared under all the other clutter. That's the trouble with clutter. It has a tendency to overwhelm and the really important stuff ends up out of sight and out of mind.

Which was probably the case with the temple when Jesus went to celebrate the Passover. It must have been chaos – a livestock market more than anything else. The noise and the busyness would have been overwhelming. It would have been impossible to pay attention to anything else, and it was the first thing that greeted Jesus when he entered the house of God. How on earth could anyone be expected to focus on what this place was really about. It was meant to be where the people of Israel could worship and adore the one true God. It was where they should be able to meet with God in prayer, to hear God's voice and understand God's ways. Instead, all the senses were drawn to the cacophony and clutter of a market place. So Jesus decided to declutter. He threw the traders and all their goods out to make space for what was really important.

Not that the temple hierarchy understood what Jesus was doing. They were too absorbed by their own clutter – the way they interpreted the law, the restrictions they imposed on people, the upkeep of their magnificent building, the taxes they demanded. They couldn't see who Jesus was because their minds were too full of their own constructs. They couldn't understand that Jesus had come to bring them closer to God and that in driving away the traders from the temple he was clearing away some of the clutter that was preventing people from meeting God in him. In fact, as John says, the disciples, his closest followers, only really understood after the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As we continue through Lent, we're preparing ourselves to celebrate the presence of the risen Christ. We might think of this as a time for decluttering our spiritual lives. As we examine our practices of worship and prayer can we identify those things which obscure our view of God? If so, we might reflect on how we can remove them so that our relationship with God is unhindered. With our face-to-face services suspended we have the opportunity this year, more than ever, to consider our own personal walk with God and to discover what is really important for our individual faith journey to continue and develop. Then when we return to regular services we'll be able to enter into worship able to 'see Christ more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more nearly, day by day.' Amen

**Ann Barlow**