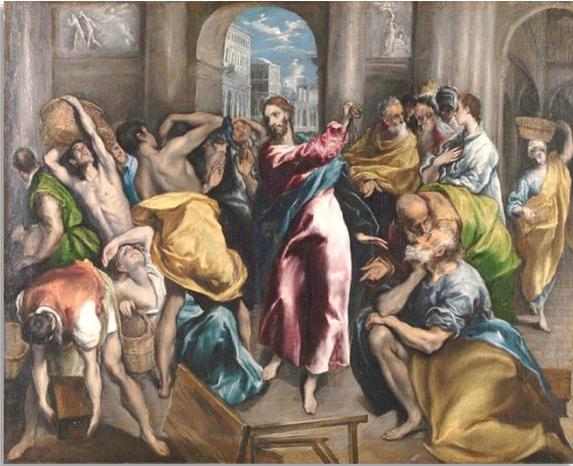


**A REFLECTIVE SERVICE
FOR SUNDAY 7th March 2021
LENT WEEK 3**



(The Purification of the Temple by El Greco National Gallery London)

You can access worship songs online by clicking the links- please be aware you may need to skip adverts!

You may wish to light a candle before you begin.

WE COME TO WORSHIP AS THE BODY OF CHRIST

Though we be physically apart, we ARE one; we are the church of God, a gathered community, brought together in the bonds of peace, assembled today in thought and concern, in spirit, in love and in prayer. We offer up to the Lord, with thankfulness, the night that has now passed, and the day that lies open before us.

We hold a moment of silence as we prepare ourselves to receive God's word.

OPENING WORDS

God speaks not with the voice of mortals, yet He speaks. In the abundance and diversity of creation God speaks; in the the velvet midnight skies God whispers His glory; in the high midday sun, God's handiwork is laid bare proclaiming His splendour; at the break of day, as the sun rises upon the horizon, God speaks His ever faithful assurance that we are loved and held eternally.

Yet it is upon the cross of Christ where God speaks most profoundly; for while it is foolish, even offensive to some, to those who are called, who know their need of His saving grace, in the vulnerable outpouring of love on the cross, it is the voice of power, wisdom and eternal hope that speaks into those who have ears to hear.

Lord speak into me this day, that I may have ears to hear and a heart ready to receive

Amen

HYMN STF 161

<https://youtu.be/4q388zBdRM8>

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you to receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in your likeness, that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise,
 cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your
 plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of
 time
that will echo down through
 eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your
 promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk
 with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is
 built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

*Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart
Townend (b. 1963)*

OPENING PRAYER

Truth be told, Jesus, there are lots of
tables that need overturning in our
lives. Beneath the veneer of
respectability, the tidy rows and neat
regulations hide dark addictions and
angry judgments, hungry greeds, and
heartless rejections. We know the pain
-- and so do those around us -- of
keeping up the façade. What a relief it
would be to have it all upset, smashed,
scattered and destroyed. So, perhaps,

Jesus, today you could pay us a visit, and
help us to radically rearrange the
furniture of our lives.

*By Revd John van de Laar, Methodist
Minister (South African)*

**Through our prayer of confession, we
invite God to enter into our hearts and
minds, to strengthen us and help us to
rearrange our lives in a pattern of holy
living.**

CONFESSION

Forgive us Lord for closing ourselves off
to the driving encouragement and
vision of your Holy Spirit, and instead,
choosing to be driven by the worldly
whip-cords of desire, convenience and
apathy.

Forgive us Lord for the times when we
have foolishly regarded ourselves as
infallible, unbreakable, and having
everything sorted, instead of being the
temple of your holy spirit, fragile,
breakable, always in need of your
strength and power.

Forgive us Lord for the times when we
have lived conforming to our own ideals
rather than living according to your
command to love one another, and to
raise one other up.

***Lord, forgive us and have mercy upon
us. AMEN***

HYMN- STF 431

<https://youtu.be/xQyEHQhnBI0>

*O, the love of my Lord is the essence
Of all that I love here on earth
All the beauty I see He has given to
me
And His giving is gentle as silence.*

*Every day, every hour, every
moment
Have been blessed by the strength
of His love
At the turn of each tide,
He is there at my side,
And His touch is as gentle as silence.*

*There've been times when I've turned
from his presence
And I've walked other paths, other
ways
But I've called on His name in the
dark of my shame
And His mercy was gentle as silence.*

NEW TESTAMENT READING

John 2:13-22

Jesus Cleanses the Temple

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables.

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. He told those who were selling the doves,

'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?'

But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 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.

REFLECTION

"HANDBAGS AND TABLES"

On the surface, my mother came across as quite an ordinary person; she made clothes, knitted, cooked excellent meals and taught us right was right and wrong was wrong! But oh, the shame of it, when she stood up publicly for what was right and made a stand. In that she was simply FEARLESS! Maybe it was her war time experience as a child in a London hospital during the blitz or maybe it was genetic, whatever it was, we knew our mother to be queen of the metaphorical "hand-bagging" long before Margaret Thatcher took up that "sport!"

My own mother's hand-bagging was rather tamer than the Prime Minister's and didn't make headline news. It took on the guise of boycotting anything with the word "Cape" on it; Cape apples and Cape grapes, spring to mind. This was in the days of apartheid in South Africa. My grandmother thought my mother was mad, particularly as we only ever had the luxury of apples and grapes when we came to England on holiday, and yes they even fell out about it but our mother continued to take a stand.

But her foray into metaphorical hand-bagging really began when we came into port in Cape Town on our way to Australia, and discovering that the post office had designated lifts, according to the colour of skin you just happened to be born with. Our mother made her outrage and one woman protest, by getting into the "WRONG" lift! She was so appalled, she even sat on a bench in the park that was not designated for white people. As children, we thought she was doing the "wrong" thing, but she was of course doing the RIGHT thing and teaching us to take a stand. Her horror just grew, as families of "mixed marriages" (as was termed then in South Africa) boarded our ship; life had become intolerable for them and they were seeking more peaceful lives in Australia or New Zealand, free of a law that condemned them because of who they loved, and I guess that was at the heart of her argument over "Cape" fruit, until ALL people were free to vote in South Africa.

But her real pièce de résistance in hand bagging, came when she queued up at the dairy board for a single pack of butter. That was the day we almost put her on a par with Jesus!!

As she waited, she saw the man in front of her bribe the person at the counter, and when she stepped forward there was obviously no butter for anyone! Needless to say, the person who took the bribe felt the full clout of my mother's handbag! She came home crying with shame that she had lost her composure, and the man who had taken her, also came home crying, but crying with rolling, bubbling laughter. It remained a favourite family narrative.

Through the words of one of the very early Charles Wesley's hymns, we receive the recurrent and seemingly enduring narrative that Jesus is ever "gentle, meek and mild", incapable of this seemingly hostile act, which appears in all the gospels.

In the synoptic gospels this event is the prequel to the arrest of this "turbulent," scandalous, self-proclaimed Messiah, who dared to challenge and overturn the man-made conventions of the day, causing ructions and uproar amongst the "religious," threatening their status and their repressive hold on the common people, in a society that held a fragile, eggshell, traitorous peace.

The gospel of John is probably written later than the others, (possibly towards the end of the 1st Century, or the beginning of the 2nd Century CE) This

event is placed at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus in John's gospel, and is possibly written for a late-1st Century Christian community; who may have been excommunicated from their Jewish communities for proclaiming Christ as Lord.

Right at the end of the gospel, the author tells us that his purpose in writing is so *"that [we] may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name,"* so it is the author's great mission and purpose to share with his community (and with those through the ages) who Jesus is; the risen Christ, who heralds the arrival of the New Kingdom and who is the one true and perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God.

From the outset the Evangelist, identifies Jesus as the "word" and embodiment of God, and in this piece of scripture, Jesus, enraged with the way in which the temple is being desecrated, overturns tables, and coins, and drives out animals; I can almost hear the squawking and see the confusion of feathers flying in the air as the whip spins. Complete mayhem! But why did Jesus take a stand and cause so much havoc?

The temple was the heart of the community where the Jews expected the Messiah to arrive;

- the money changers were defrauding the pilgrims to the festival by overcharging them

- animals brought for sacrifice were often rejected for being imperfect, and the pilgrims were likely to have had to make an exorbitant purchase at the temple
- the courtyards were so full of people carrying out immoral practices, that no one could worship properly
- Jesus the Messiah, came to the temple, but the people were far from ready to receive either him or the coming Kingdom, such was their focus upon greed and corruption, and those responsible for religious practises had got their priorities all wrong, and had evidently taken their eyes off God.

This "overturning-anger" that took a stand, and banished the temple of its heinous defilement, signified the fulfilment of God's promise, a "Cosmic spring clean" a new beginning, with the journey culminating in the crucifixion, death and glorious resurrection of Jesus, who speaks of his own body as being the true temple of God's dwelling place, and that even when it is destroyed, he will raise it up again! Of course Jesus was not talking about the fabric of the building, but about himself.

We cannot help but recognize, that the pandemic, has had profoundly negative effects on societies, and faith communities and so much more. It is just as though the tables have been turned over on us and the contents tipped out everywhere, and we have been given a jolly good metaphorical "hand-bagging" for good measure too!

As we walk back into the “mess” to clear up, and resurrect ourselves as individuals, and as communities, what is it that needs to be kept? What is it that needs to change? What is it that needs to be disposed of? What needs to change? What is the focus and vision that we discern Jesus driving us towards? Will it be uncomfortable? Maybe. Will it mean a “new order”? Perhaps. So many unanswered questions, but one thing I do know is that it will need as many “able hands” on deck to step up and step out as we go forwards, always remembering that Christ is in the mess and muddle and uncertainty with us, if we but listen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

With confidence, we bring our needs and the needs of others before you Lord.

God, in your unfailing love,
hear our prayer.

We bring before you those who live surrounded by violence and fear, whose minds have been traumatised, and live in a state of perceived fear.

God, in your unfailing love,
hear our prayer.

We bring before you those who have lost their way in life, either by choice or coercion and those who have lost their liberty.

God, in your unfailing love,
hear our prayer.

We bring before you Lord, our families, those who are as family to us, our friends and those known only to us who are in need of our prayers.

God, in your unfailing love,
hear our prayer.

We bring ourselves before you Lord, as we search for new ways forward to serve you in our world. Walk with us in the messiness of life, and enliven our spirits with confidence and joy.

God, in your unfailing love,
hear our prayer.

Merciful God, give us strength and courage for tomorrow so we may live in faithful obedience to your holy will. Guard our hearts and minds from all that might distract us and keep us from living out our commitment to you.

Help us to find our true worth in knowing you more fully, and serving you more faithfully. **AMEN**

LORD’S PRAYER Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

HYMN STF- 662

<https://youtu.be/sCLvz-LHyeQ>

Have you heard God's voice ;
has your heart been stirred ?
Are you still prepared to follow ?
Have you made a choice to remain
and serve,
though the way be rough and
narrow ?

REFRAIN

*Will you walk the path that will cost
you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow ?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to
you
the disciples of tomorrow ?*

Will you use your voice ;
will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent ?
Will you make a choice to stand
your ground
when the crowds are turning
violent ?

REFRAIN

In your city streets
will you be God's heart ?
Will you listen to the voiceless ?
Will you stop and eat, and when
friendships start,
will you share your faith with the
faithless ?

REFRAIN

Will you watch the news with the
eyes of faith
and believe it could be different ?
Will you share your views using

words of grace ?
Will you leave a thoughtful
imprint ?

*We will walk the path that will cost
us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to
us
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G. Jones

FINAL REFLECTION

Come to your Temple here with
liberation And overturn these tables of
exchange, Restore in me my lost
imagination,
Begin in me for good the pure change.
Come as you came, an infant with your
mother,
That innocence may cleanse and claim
this ground.
Come as you came, a boy who sought
his father
With questions asked and certain
answers found.
Come as you came this day, a man in
anger, Unleash the lash that drives a
pathway through,
Face down for me the fear, the shame,
the danger,
Teach me again to whom my love is
due. Break down in me the barricades
of death And tear the veil in two with
your last breath.

*Malcolm Guite. Sounding the Seasons: 70 Sonnets
for the Christian Year*

BLESSING

May the holy wisdom of God
Guard our ways and guide our paths
May the living truth of God
Enlighten our hearts
and open our minds
And may the living Spirit of God
Give us life, and life to the full!

Amen!



(El Greco drew an interesting analogy between the purification of the temple, and the banishment of Adam and Eve from Eden, and added it to the top left hand side of his painting- page 1)