

**Gospel John 2.13-22**

<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>They 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.

**Reflection**

Jesus is not very excited by money. This reading is a culmination of his attitude to money over several stories, the widow's mite, paying taxes to Caesar, the rich young man, the talents. All these stories tell us about being careful that money does not become the master of our lives, or the most important thing in our faith. But that also we need to develop the right attitude to money.

As long as we feel ourselves defined by our wealth, then we will respond to any challenge about how we use money with a degree of upset and anger.

Money is needed, it makes the world go round of course! Money means the difference between being fed and going hungry, being housed and homelessness, between being respected, honoured, revered, and being ignored, rejected and dismissed. Money is important. And important things are open to being manipulated and abused.

Faith is important too, and like money is open to being manipulated and abused. Sadly we too often read of cases where Christians, and Christian leaders, are involved in abusive relationships, and illegality. Christians are of course only human, but it is right that we should be held to account for our faith. How we live each day, each night, speaks about how we enact the faith we profess on a Sunday.

In the temple the money changers were doing an authorised job. Since the introduction of the Roman coinage system those Jews attending the temple could not offer the main currency, as it had on every coin a graven image of Caesar. So

they had to take their Roman coins to be changed to coins that did not bear any image. But it was changed at a price, and sometimes the interest was exorbitant, and manipulation in the temple was rife. Only the temple priests could decide if your animal you were sacrificing was good enough. And funnily enough the same temple priest also had access to their own breeding stock of animals which could be sold to those whose animals did not pass the test, and those who did not own animals to bring to sacrifice.

Jesus taught us with the Lord's prayer that access to God was not guarded and judged by the gatekeepers of the temple, but a matter of personal desire and commitment to pray to the Father. This meant that all the worry of the temple sacrificial system was defunct. I cannot find any notice of Jesus offering a sacrifice, although we know that Mary and Joseph did at his birth. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Jesus was himself the sacrificial lamb that as an atonement for the sins of the world, was once offered. The money changers and the animal sales folk did their jobs for money, Jesus offered himself only for the love of God's people and God's world.

Money is important, it is the currency through which we can support God's work in the world, with which we can care for our neighbour, and our family. But money is not worship, although without money our worship may become compromised as the buildings rot and the ministers are not trained. Money is not prayer, although too much money can make us complacent and not ready to rely on God or ask for God's help, and too little money may mean that there is no energy or time to focus on God or prayer. Money is not faith, but sadly at times we use or withhold money to get our own way, to control the church to be and see wealth as a gift from God, but fail to let God direct how we use it!

Jesus did not see money as evil, or good but as functional. A means of being able to live as God's family. He was saddened when money become the focus instead of God, he was angry when money manipulated access to God. This lent, I wonder if we need to review how we use our money? What does our use of money say about our faith? How does money rule our thoughts and actions or enable them?

*Lord, give us the strength and the faith to respond to your challenging words. We ask you to help us to be responsible stewards of money, remembering that all we have comes from you. We ask you to bless us with the courage, generosity, and selflessness that we may use our money wisely and generously to help multiply your gifts among us for the glory of your name. Amen*

### **Prayers Lent 3 written by John Iles**

\*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many blessings of the week that is past; we thank you for sustaining and guiding us through its many trials and tribulations; we thank you for the glory of Spring as it establishes itself into our beautiful surroundings and we thank you for bringing us through one more week of lockdown during which a glimmer of light has begun to appear at the end of the long tunnel down which we have travelled during the last twelve months.  
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

\*Lord God, make our faith, we pray, resolute in this time when our places of worship are closed; help us to find you in prayer and in the peace of your creation which surrounds us; introduce us to new ways to find you in our everyday lives as did our patron saints before us when they were inspired to establish your church in our land; walk ever closer with us as we follow our journey of faith with you.  
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

\*Encourage us, Lord to be a caring church throughout this pandemic; create in us the ability to identify the mental strains and suffering with which so many people have been afflicted ; grant us the strength to emerge stronger in faith and more able to deal with the challenges which lie ahead; guide our Archbishop Justin, our Bishop Philip, Vanda our Rector as she prepares for the next stage of her journey of faith and all our clergy that they may be inspired to celebrate our faith with imagination and joy. Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

\*Merciful Father, we commend to your care all who are suffering in body mind or spirit at this time; we commend, especially, those who have lost loved ones due to the Covid virus; those who have not been able to have contact with loved ones and those whose suffering has been extended due to the pressures of the pandemic; comfort and succour all who suffer and embrace them with your love.  
Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

\*God in heaven, your house was used as a marketplace by traders and moneychangers rather than as a temple of prayer; our houses of prayer and worship have been quiet for too long and we await the time when their doors may be opened wide to allow all your faithful servants to celebrate with you once more; sustain us and help us to prepare for that day when, once again, we may give thanks and praise.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our saviour Jesus Christ.**

## February's pause for thought with Bishop Philip

"Here's a fun fact for you - well I think it's quite fun anyway!

If you go to the Book of Common Prayer, the Church of England's old prayer book that's still used in many churches, and find Psalm 46, it's said you'll find something very strange.

Count 46 words in from the beginning and you find the word 'shake'; count 46 words in from the end (and this is Psalm 46, remember so that number is significant) and you find the word 'spear.' Put them together and of course you get the word, the name, 'Shakespeare'.

Some people say that shows that William Shakespeare had a hand in putting the Psalms into the language of his day, and that this strange little fact is the way Britain's most famous poet and playwright leaves his 'calling card' embedded in the text, just waiting for someone to stumble over it.

It's true that Shakespeare was writing about the same time the Book of Common Prayer was being developed, but personally I think it's all just a strange coincidence. And I'm not sure, if you count them, 'spear' is exactly 46 words from the end anyway. Sorry to burst that bubble – but do have a look for yourselves. For all that, I think Psalm 46 has something much more important to tell us. It reads like it was written at a time of real turbulence. It talks about the earth shaking, the waters of the sea roaring and foaming, and the mountains trembling with tumult. It all sounds rather like an earthquake and a tsunami to me.

We've not been through an earthquake this last year – but doesn't it feel like the whole earth has been shaken – and our lives with it? When earthquakes come, some things remain standing, others fall. We don't really know what our new landscape will look like, post-pandemic. What will still be standing?

But this Psalm does tell us of one thing that will endure and survive:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

There is a refuge that will endure. There is always somewhere – someone – in whom we can always take refuge and be safe, no matter how severe the shaking of this life might be."

*This post also appeared in the Truro Voice this month.*