

*Jesus cleanses the Temple*

Exodus 20:1-17, I Corinthians 1:18-25, John 2:13-22

When I was small, I regularly attended church with my mother at Holy Trinity, Darnall, in Sheffield. ‘Our’ habitual pew was half-way down on the right hand side (in conventional terms, the ‘south’ side, but the plot on which the church had been built in 1839 was somewhat constrained, and the ‘east’ end was more north than east) and from it we could see very clearly a print depicting Jesus cleansing the Temple. I remember that Jesus was dressed in red, and I rather think this may be the same image:



Whether or not that is the case, you get the general picture, and you can perhaps see why this particular gospel incident sticks in my mind. One thing I remember noticing, Jesus looks quite stern, and the men (and they are all men) round him look discomfited. When you then realise the scene is set in a place of worship and Jesus’ action is so very un-place of worship-like (and certainly nothing like Holy Trinity, Darnall) it is not surprising that my attention was arrested by it.

Or course, that is the point. It is not that Jesus is doing something reprehensible in the Temple, the focal point for Jewish worship, where God came closest to his people, but that the traders, money changers and the rest of them were doing the reprehensible thing: they had connived with the theologians of their day to make a profitable business out of their House of God,

by using the ritual laws to their own advantage and cashing in on the bible-ordained regulations. The problem was that it had become difficult to ‘see’ God beyond all the trading and money changing.

Jesus is asserting that the worship of God must come first.

The Old Testament lesson for today contains the Ten Commandments, and the first four of those concern duty towards God (Have no other God, Make no idol, Do not take God’s name in vain and keep the Sabbath holy to God) before passing on to those governing relations with others. This reaffirms God’s primacy in life.

Now it is a question for us, as it is for all generations, how much we give the first place in our lives to God. We have plenty of evidence recorded in the gospels from Jesus’ own life that he was not one of those people who are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use, but we equally cannot think other than that all his earthly life that we have recorded was lived in a state of close communion with his Father, even, or perhaps particularly, in those most extreme of times during his passion and crucifixion. I think we all probably know, or have known, at least a few people who are very active in serving others in their daily lives, who have about them a sense of being in communion with the divine. They are probably the people least likely to say anything about it, but their lives speak the truth of it.

Paul says in today’s lesson from I Corinthians that ‘we proclaim Christ crucified’; this is not an easy or comfortable message, but it remains true that the shallow and easy course of life is not the one that

leads to glory, but only that which fixes its gaze on Jesus and follows him, serving others along the way.

Clive Lemmon