

Out of the way

by Rev Dan Balsdon | March 2021 | read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

In the gospels we read the story of Jesus turning over the tables in the temple courtyard. Perhaps the closest we get in the gospels to seeing Jesus express his frustration in a physical way.

It was coming to the festival of Passover, when Jews would remember how God passed over the land of Egypt and led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

It was an important festival, and Jesus heads to the temple – where he finds a menagerie of traders. And what does Jesus do? He overturns the tables; he drives the animals and traders out of the temple and declares ‘stop making my father’s house a market place’.

Why does he do this? Why does he make such a scene?

The trading that was happening in the temple courtyard had become a distraction from worship, and for some even a barrier to worship.

People were having to buy animals in the courtyard to then go to make their sacrifices, and to buy the animals they must get temple currency – like me as a Brit going to China and trying to use Pound Sterling to buy my dinner – I wouldn’t get what I needed.

The temple traders which may well have begun as a practice to enable those who didn’t have access to animals for sacrifices to be able to access them, have become part of a system of injustice.

Reflection on this gospel story might poses for us various questions about worship, economics, justice and injustice, anger and frustration...

But today I want us to briefly reflect on the words of Jesus: ‘Stop making my father’s house a marketplace’. Get this stuff out of the way, it is distracting us, distracting you, from God.

As Christians we have a different relationship with buildings than Jews did with the temple in Jerusalem. Church buildings are a gathering place, and can become sacred space to us, through our encountering God through worship and through lives of others. But we also know that God is no more present in these

buildings than all the world. Yet buildings have a significance and value for many.

In the last 12 months as Christians, we have been faced with learning to have a different relationship with buildings that we have done before. When we have gathered in them, we have done so under restrictions which restrain us from singing and even talking with one another. For much of the time they have not been gathering places at all.

For me personally, the restrictions and particularly the responsibility of leading worship within them when I have done, has distracted, and limited me from being able to encounter God through worship and interaction with God's community.

I encourage you to reflect today – what distracts you from worship and encountering God? What can you do to overcome those distractions?