

Jesus drives the merchants and money changers out of the Temple courtyard in all four of the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It is my least favorite story about Jesus' ministry, but because it is recorded by all the four gospels, it may have meaning for modern people.

When I was ten, I was given a 4-H feeder calf from my grandmother. All summer I would feed the calf, teach it to lead, wash it and comb it. I named her Jesse, after my grandmother. At county fair time, I brought Jesse, the calf, into the show ring and competed against all the other calves. At the end of the show, the calves would be auctioned off for slaughter, thus making money from all the work.

Naming your calf after your grandmother isn't a good idea! When it came time to sell, I must have pleaded with my dad to buy Jesse back. We brought her back to the ranch where she stayed for many years. It is an example of the economic system of the world clashed with my love and compassion.

One way to think of Jesus' actions in the temple is to bring into contrast the economic system of the world over and against the way that God's economy works. The world's system is often about exploitation, abuse, and power. God's economy is about compassion, generosity, and relationship.

Here in the U.S, the system seems to be 'might makes right.' Money is solely for the purpose of accumulating more and to use it to gain power. Ordinary people are impacted by those who seek to gain power through systems of exploitation. While it does impact us here in the U.S., I see it much more clearly in the lives of my Christian friends in Pakistan. The actions of the U.S. government has far reaching impact beyond our borders.

Several years ago, Pakistan was having problems with financial stability. They received a loan from the International Monetary Fund, which came with the stipulation that major adjustments be made in the price of fuels used to create electricity for the nation. Expenses for ordinary people, who had little ability to pay for utilities before, began to skyrocket. Just as the economy began to level off, the closing of the Strait of Hormuz caused much needed imports of fuel to stop. This caused the price of utilities to increase even further, making life even more difficult for an already economically strapped people.

In hopes of weathering the economic situation caused by things beyond their control, many individuals seek assistance from family that has emigrated to other nations. Since it is difficult for Christians to emigrate (due to the expense), few have family that can help. Christian ministries are also impacted because they have few financial resources to rely on. Part of the solution to the high cost of electricity is to install solar. Unfortunately, it costs around \$3000 to install a solar system. When the average yearly income is between \$2000 and \$3000, it is almost impossible for a family or ministry to purchase solar panel systems. They are caught in an economic system that pushes them further into poverty due to higher electricity costs.

This economic disparity may have been the issue Jesus was addressing in the temple court. The economic system of the world seems to be designed to exploit the most vulnerable. The economic system of God's reign is to have mercy and compassion on the most vulnerable, both in the U.S. and abroad.

Which system are you valuing?