

Sermon ☩ March 7, 2021

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Try to picture this in your mind. You are watching Public Television, it is a rerun of Mr. Rogers. It is the beginning of the show and he enters his "house". He does the bit with his sweater and shoes. Visits with his tropical fish for a moment and drops some food into their tank.

And then Mr. McFeely knocks on the door. He is, of course, bringing Mr. Roger's' mail. In his kindly way, Mr. Rogers thanks Mr. McFeely and then as he peruses the mail . . . he goes wild. "No!", he screams, "*No more junk mail!*"

What happens next is incomprehensible, the normally subdued Mr. Rogers runs wildly around the room throwing his mail into the air and screaming at the top of his lungs, "*No more junk mail!*"

I doubt if we will see this episode in the near future. But we need to understand that as "out-of-character" as it would be for Fred Rogers to act in this manner, many considered Jesus' cleansing of the temple to be equally out of character.

That must have been some sight . . . Jesus with a whip of cords literally driving men out of the temple. Have you ever noticed that not many artists have chosen to depict this scene on canvas? Some scholars have even tried to "hush-hush" this passage . . . "*he was having a bad day.*" And if he was "*having a bad day*" is there anything wrong with that?

I often talk about the fact that I'm not a big fan of the way that Jesus is portrayed in the movies. To be sure, he was probably not a tall, blond, blued, fair-skinned individual. And the movie portrayals so often present us with a calm, mild-mannered . . . kind of nondescript personality. The problem with the movie portrayals is that they limit our perception of Jesus to whatever box the director and particular actor choose to place him in.

My perception of Jesus is that he was so much more than how he has been portrayed in movies. More dynamic . . . more real . . . more alive. Okay . . . so why did he do what he did?

He drove them out of the temple because the money changers were taking advantage of the common people. And he drove them out because sacrificial animals were being sold in a place where people were supposed to worship. We need to understand that this action of Jesus was wholly consistent with what God intended to accomplish in and through his son.

Much of what Jesus was about was renewal. He came to change things. Whoa . . . there's that word we don't always hear in church . . . *change*. *How many Episcopalians does it take to change a light bulb? CHANGE!!!*

And this was not change simply for the sake of changes, his renewal would be responsible, faithful, accountable. If we view this passage in the light of renewal (change) . . . we can, perhaps, consider our own situation and our own "responsibility".

It takes responsible people to confess sins of omission. In a world that cries out for a word . . . a sign from God . . . we plead that the task is too big for any one person. We'd sure like to help with this renewal . . . this change, but we don't have the time. There will never be any signs of renewal in the church without a plea for forgiveness and without our seeking guidance . . . direction.

We don't know where following God will lead us. And in a way it doesn't matter. What does matter is that we hear what God has to say to us.

Another responsibility in renewal is to know what God is like. The picture of Christ with a whip in his hands is wholly in keeping with what God is like. Our picture of God is often distorted by our preference for a smorgasbord-style religion in which we choose only those stories and events that make us comfortable. Truth is, Jesus was just as much our Lord cleansing the temple as when he hung on the cross.

God isn't some flabby, good-natured, middle-aged guy who is so kindly that he would never make a fuss about our sins. Change . . . renewal may entail a cleansing of our temples. And this cleansing may be uncomfortable and disturbing and noisy . . . but that is often the way of change.

Be not afraid of such renewal for it, too, is the way of God. Our God is the God of the whip and wind . . . the cradle and the Cross. Our God is a God of change . . . renewal.

May we truly hear what God has to say. And may we know what God is like as we experience God's power.

In the midst of renewal and change, we receive the blessing of God. And remember with a blessing comes responsibility . . . and that is the price of renewal.

