

Illustration of Ray – St Christopher's South Oakleigh

Of course Ray was alluding to the time when Jesus cleansed the temple in Jerusalem. And like Ray so many people take this passage out of context and in doing so miss its true meaning and message.

Ordinarily there was nothing untoward about selling sacrificial animals. It was the usual custom for Jewish people to purchase sacrificial animals for their religious observances, and this was a special festival – the Passover, (a period of thanksgiving for the mighty act of God in rescuing God's people from bondage to the Egyptians). And of course there were thousands of people coming into Jerusalem over the festive season.

So the problem wasn't the selling of animals, but rather the location!. Usually the trade of sacrificial animals happened outside the city walls, most likely in the Kedron Valley.

Instead they were being sold in the Temple. It is highly likely that this occurred in the Gentile section of the Temple which was still an area of worship. Even the money changes were in the wrong section of the Temple as they normally assembled at the main entrance, some distance away from the Gentile section.

The new location was necessitated by the large volume of people attending the High Festival of Passover. Imagine then the mayhem as people went from one table and enclosure after another looking for the best animal to sacrifice. And then there was the noise and smell of livestock, the cooing doves, clinking of coins being exchanged and thrown into the receptacles.

Surely Jesus seeing all this commotion gave him a sense that these people had traded this sacred place of worship with the deafening sounds of a Market place, like a 1st Century Vic Market in Melbourne on a Saturday morning.

Since his childhood Jesus knew the Temple was the most sacred place to commune with God and because of this he knew it to be a place of reverence, humility and awe.

As an aside: the Church of England has not been immune to this problem of animals in the sanctuary. In the 17th Century the Archbishop of Canterbury William Laud introduced Altar Rails because of his High regard for the Sanctuary (stating it was where the Body of Christ is located and therefore the most holy of places on the church). This was welcomed by other Bishops as it was also a means of keeping livestock and other animals from entering the sanctuary. Bishop Wren of Norwich noted that the altar rails were "so thick with pillars that doggs may not gett in."

Why were the money changes in the Temple. It was Temple Tax time and only Temple coinage could be used. Therefore people brought along their Roman money to exchange with the Temple coins known as Tyria, after that they tossed them into large receptacles in between the Gentile section and the main Temple precinct.

Because there is no declaration by Jesus saying that the Temple tax was wrong, we must assume that he accepted its place in the life of the Jewish people. Again it seems to be the location of the money changes that is the problem.

So the backdrop is clear: Hundreds of animals. Hundreds of people. Hundreds of coins. There's incredible noise, suffocating smells, and much pushing and shoving! It was all too much!

Jesus prophetically takes action in what can only be describe as an act of De-consecration.

Don Carson in his Commentary points out that there is nothing unusual about Jesus making a crude whip to remove the Cattle and Sheep. It makes sense, if you've ever tried to move a sheep or cow and they have no idea who you are.

In moving some of the cattle and sheep Jesus was demonstrating to the on lookers that there place in the temple was not acceptable.

Similarly the money changes were in the wrong place. Surely other people realise how inappropriate it was for these traders to be in the Temple precinct and not in their usual place. Perhaps that is why people did not see Jesus acting inappropriately. May be they saw him as a prophet, even the Messiah.

Why Jesus' speaks his mind to those who sold doves is unclear. Perhaps there were many more of these people than the other traders and I can imagine many cages of doves dotted around the Gentile section of the Temple.

Jesus says: "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" Perhaps removing the doves, animals and Tyria will restore the Temple as the Father's House. This therefore is the sign of de-consecration becoming the new sign of reconsecration.

Notice the Jewish leaders did not display any anger toward Jesus. Instead they too seemed to acknowledge Jesus as a prophet for they asked Jesus to produce a sign, something to prove he had the authority from God to do and say the things he had done. Often the prophets in Old Testament times revealed the majesty and authority of God through signs: Moses parting the sea; Elijah defeating the gods of Baal; Daniel and the lion den.

The sign Jesus offers is quite remarkable "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Now there is unbelief because even after 46years the temple was still in the process of being rebuilt. At this point the Jews probably considered Jesus to be crazy, even his disciples may have thought their master had gone off the rails. Remember the Jews in their accusations against Jesus at his trial used this episode as proof of his blasphemous behaviour.

But Jesus was referring to the reconsecration of the Temple. Not the actual bricks and mortar of a temple but rather the very person of Jesus through his death and resurrection. And the truth of what he proclaimed remained a secret until after his resurrection, when all things were revealed to the disciples.

“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”.

Don Carson, suggests that it wasn't until Pentecost when the disciples came to believe every aspect of Christ's ministry.

This remarkable story of Jesus cleansing the Temple leads us from the prophetic act of de-consecration of the Temple to the glorious consecration of a new everlasting and undefiled Temple in the very person of Jesus Christ.

This transformation became central to the disciples understanding of the divine nature of God. For now instead of the Temple where God used to be found, we have Jesus in whom God is truly found.

Sometimes it is easy to make our churches like temples. When I was the Curate at All Saints East St Kilda I was fascinated with the beautifully gilded words over the Chancel, Psalm 48:9 "we wait for thy loving kindness O Lord in the midst of Thy temple". The words lifted the thoughts of the congregation to a higher and more holy plain.

And Sundays were like that. No talking. No joy. And little singing! Sermons were long and painfully academic. I ran a family service but it could not be during the main service times. I had to create a service at Midday (Midchurch). One of the old regulars who opposed the service, said "I come here to this church; because this is where God is found" When I challenged him and suggested God is actually found within you" he wouldn't have a bar of it.

Over and over again many people make our churches like brick and mortar temples. Yet a church, cannot be a Temple unless the one who has become the new Temple Jesus Christ is in the midst of each and every church.

And this occurs solely because Jesus resides in each believer, like a temple, wherein the presence of God is found. Paul says 1 Cor 3:16 "***Don't you know that you are God's Temple and God's Spirit lives in you?***" Obviously God's Spirit transforms our lives through the death and resurrection of Jesus his temple, his church, here on earth.

Are we the Temple of God? Yes.

Are our church buildings temples of God? No. But they are sacred and provide us with sacred places to worship God. And to this end we need to maintain them to the glory of God. Port Melbourne.

Is it wrong to do trading on a Sunday in a church? No. As long as the heart of the traders is for Jesus and they belong to the Body of Christ, the people gathered to worship God.