

What would be the best thing that could happen to you today?
It's a simple question,
But do you think you know the answer?

OK, let's put ourselves in the shoes of the money changers,
Of the people selling the cattle, sheep, and doves in the temple
That we hear about in today's Gospel reading.
And ask ourselves the question:
What's the best thing that could have happened for them,
On the day that Jesus came into the temple?

Let's put ourselves in their shoes:
It's early in the morning, they walking to the temple.
It's the Passover - it's a festive time with large crowds.
They're thinking about the day ahead,
And they're going over what a good day would be,
About the best thing that could happen to them in the day ahead.
Things like getting on well with the landlords, the temple authorities;
And having harmonious dealings with their fellow traders,
And perhaps most importantly, making a good profit from their trade.
Perhaps there was a slight twinge of conscience about the probity
Of trading in the temple,
But then everyone was going along with it.
From the crowds who used their services to the temple authorities
Who presumably got their cut of the profits.

But then Jesus comes along
And violently expels them from the temple.
Was *that*, in fact, the best thing that could have happened to them?
Well, it all depends on who Jesus is.

Today from God's word I'll be proclaiming
That Jesus is The One who has authority to cleanse what is defiled.
That when he does his cleansing work he brings true blessing and lasting good.
I'll be proclaiming that through his death and resurrection
He has revealed himself to be the place where God truly resides
And that when he comes to us

He has the authority to cleanse us from all that makes us unclean
And to make even our bodies fit temples of the Holy Spirit
Places where God is glorified.

Let's listen to how the reading begins:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Three times in John's Gospel Jesus goes up to Jerusalem for the Passover
He goes up, because Jerusalem is in the hills

And the understanding that Jesus ministry was for three years

Evidently comes from the threefold visit of Jesus to Jerusalem for the festival
As recorded in John's Gospel.

In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables.

This is simply recorded by the Evangelist, without any particular comment.
John doesn't tell us what *he* thinks about this.

But we are about to find out about what *Jesus* thinks about it
Both by his *actions* and his *words*.

Listen: **Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'**

First of all Jesus makes a whip: this takes time and thought and skill.

It's a deliberate, cool act that shows intention: he has a plan.

Then, equipped with the whip, he acts.

Now different translations take what happens in different ways.

In our translation it seems that with the whip he drives the sheep and cattle out

Other translations give the picture that he drives the *people* out

And the cattle and sheep along with them.

I'm inclined to this latter path of translation

– it seems how the Greek reads to me.

But however we take it, it's a dramatic and violent action.

Again we find in the Gospels that Jesus is not *Nice*, that he is not *Tame*
That he is not restrained by the need to fit in.

Jesus is not *Nice*, he is *Good*. He is not *Tame*, he is *Courageous*.

He is not restrained by the need to fit in.

He acts as The One who has true authority.

And it doesn't stop there:

He pours out the coins of the money changes, and overturns their tables

*Can you picture it? Have you ever dropped money in a crowded place?
Can't you picture the money changers stooping down in panic
Trying to collect together the coins before other people swoop in?
And on top of this, he orders to drive sellers out:
And rebukes them from turning the temple – his Father's house
Into a market place.
He rebukes them from profaning the holy
For defiling what belongs to God.*

Now notice how the reading goes on: **[Jesus'] disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'**

This is a quote from Psalm 69

– a psalm that comes up a lot in the New Testament.

For Jesus' disciples, as for us

The Old Testament helps us understand who Jesus is.

But knowing about Jesus also reveals to us the meaning of the Old Testament

That it is, in fact, ultimately, about *Jesus*:

Especially about his atoning suffering and death

And about his victory over death and the grave.

This focus on Jesus' death and resurrection is at play in what happens next:

The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?'

The Jewish authorities want to know what gives Jesus the right

To act as he does, to with physical violence

And with words of command and rebuke to cleanse the temple

Of that which profanes it, of that which defiles it.

Jesus reply is mystifying to the authorities

Because they think he is talking about the temple building.

But [the text goes on to say,] **he was speaking of the temple of his body.**

Evidently not even his disciples knew at the time what Jesus meant.

They had a journey ahead with him

That would take them on his path to the Cross.

It was only by taking this path with Jesus

And by his encountering them in his resurrection

That they would come to understand what happened on that day.

This is how the reading concludes:

After [Jesus] 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.

From the vantage of the resurrection the disciples could go back

And in remembering what had happened that day

And in particular the words that Jesus had said

They believed the Scriptures about Jesus,

They believed the words Jesus had spoken.

They believed, and we, with them, believe.

They believed, and we believe

That Jesus is The One who has authority to come to what belongs to God

And to cleanse it of all that makes it unclean

Of all that profanes and defiles.

They believed, and we with them

That it is through his suffering, death, and resurrection

That Jesus, the Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world

Today the best thing that can happen to us is for Jesus to come to us

And to cleanse us from those things we cannot clean ourselves.

From the things that come out of our heart and defile us.

He cleanses us through his gracious word of peace and forgiveness

A word that has power to overturn and to drive out

All that would make us unclean.

Do not be afraid to agree with Jesus,

to confess that there are things that defile you

Things that you need to be cleansed from.

He comes to you to cleanse, to restore, to heal

So that you may glorify God in your bodies

Which are temples of the Holy Spirit,

So that you may trust God, love your neighbour,

So that God may fulfill his commands here among us

By his power, and to his glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.