

## Where Divine and Human Meet

Wayne Waibel – 03/03/2024

The synoptic gospels all place this story at the end of Christ's ministry, using it as the pivotal moment when the ruling elite began to conspire to kill Jesus. John on the other hand places it at the beginning of His ministry. I don't know that the chronological precision is as important as the theological significance.

What we see in this capacity of Jesus to become outraged presents us with a dilemma of sorts. How to reconcile the manifestation of anger in the Prince of Peace. And that anger is ignited over conditions that really don't justify the response.

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All good Jews were expected to make the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover at least once in their lifetimes. The temple was built to accommodate the influx of humanity during such festivals and included a Gentile area.

This area was designed to hold the temple sacrifices for purchase as travelers would be unable to get their own livestock to the temple without blemish. And since it was unacceptable to donate any coinage that bore the image of the emperor – it was necessary to have an exchange where such coinage could be traded for appropriate tender.

Christ's outburst is never really explained. We don't know what tripped him off the line. John actually has Jesus fashion himself a whip to spice up the scene a little bit. And His anger is not attended with temple guards arresting and detaining Him. The temple rulers simply wanted a sign that revealed His authority to act in such a way.

Now we get to see the back story, or perhaps, more importantly – the motivation. "Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise." Jesus has now indicated who He is. "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." Jesus has confirmed who He is and added what He will do.

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Oppression is nothing new in this world. The little guy has been taking it on the chin since Cain and Abel. The notion of might makes right continues to flourish both on playgrounds and in board rooms.

The convenient phrase is white supremacy, but the concept is Empire. And the effort to eradicate this harbinger of misery will be exhausting and take a heavy toll. This demanding work of correction is generational. We will not see the result of our efforts in this lifetime.

Such is the work of post-modern children of the living God. We have a moral responsibility – certainly, but equally certain is the fact that we have as our theater of operations the thin places - where divine and human meet.

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The Ten Commandments were given to the people of Israel as a gift to shape their love of God and one another. The first five deal with how we are to approach God – the latter five - how we are to treat one another. And it very truly is a gift.

Once you get past the “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not” – what you have is a very loving framework by which to live your life. To be bound in covenant with God, is to be set free to live as God’s people.

These laws are not so much a moral imperative as they are ways of living. Taken in that context – they’re a little easier to digest. The Old Testament can be extremely dramatic – and that is intentional. It is an oral history.

The orators of antiquity needed to infuse drama to bring the ancient stories to life from generation to successive generation. A close examination of the text will always reveal that God's steadfast love far outreaches God's wrath.

So, it would follow that the wrath of Jesus would also be far subordinate to His lovingkindness. We stand apart by holy speech and practice for the mending of God's holy world. And we need to hear the story of today's gospel lesson because we may have more in common with the targets of Christ's judgement than with the righteousness of His cause.

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Paul reminds us that wisdom alone is insufficient for understanding God. We must do the work. Theology and ethics are inseparable. Faithful worship of God leads to proper love of neighbor. And that worship and love will invariably result in the restoration of creation.

The world continues to defy reason, and as a result – spirals toward destruction. But we are not of the world. For us – the cross still means something. It represents the solution and salvation for humankind in the form of the perfect sacrifice. The One who reigns above all - surrendering His life in the most brutal manner possible in His time – that the rest of humanity may meet the divine in our time. Amen.