

SERMON: 2018/03/04 (3rd Sunday in Lent, Year B) - Exodus 20:1-17; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25 & John 2:13-22\_BTR

[Invite the children to sit at the front.]

In England, we don't play (American) football.

But I've been watching it a bit on TV and I think I've learnt how to play.

So, at the beginning, the national anthem is played for which I kneel (down) on one knee, yes?

Then, when the referee blows his whistle I kick the ball forward, *hard*.

We chase it.

And to stop me, members of the opposite team can "block" me, right? Or by throwing bananas? [A banana is thrown by a member of the congregation.]

[Wait for response.]

No?!

Oh.

Well, can they throw bananas at the players during half-time? [A banana is thrown by a member of the congregation.]

[Wait for response.]

They can't do it then either?!

But everybody who watches cartoons knows that bananas are great for causing people to trip and slip.

It seems like a great idea!

I think that throwing bananas is the crucial missing ingredient from football! [A banana is thrown by a member of the congregation.]

But you say that nobody should throw bananas as part of the game.

And this is because...

[ "...it is against the rules." ]

And why's that important?

Because rules are a good thing.

They give order; structure.

And without them things would be *chaos!* And confusing and untidy; and there'd be lots of uncertainty and fearfulness.

God, then, gave the “Ten Commandments” on Mount Horeb for the same reason: as an act of grace - of His love.

Let’s pray: Father God,...

[Ask children to leave.]

Okay, you’ve got 24 hours left to live.

*What do you do?!*

This is, more-or-less, the premise for more movies and TV shows than I could name.

And I’ve watched most of them!

Will grisly CTU agent Jack Bauer find the “dirty-bomb” before it explodes?

That one question has consumed hundreds of hours of my life that I’ll never get back.

And advertised on Amazon Prime this very week, the actor Ethan Hawke, a multiple Oscar nominee, can be found running around dodging bullets, scratching at a digital clock that has been surgically inserted into his arm, counting away his few remaining hours: will he save his family?

I don’t know, *but I’ll find out tonight!*

Well, Jesus didn’t have all the time in the world either.

I’ve mentioned previously that from the moment of His baptism in the Jordan, a countdown began to His crucifixion on Calvary, and He had only about two and a half to three years [n.1] in which to change the world and correct the *crooked* course of history.

So, what *does* He do under such circumscribed circumstances?

And, given that, whatever He did chose to do *first* must have been something awfully significant; *critical* for “framing” who He was - for “putting down a marker” as to what made His message especially unique and ‘insight[ful] into the character...[and] purpose[s]...of God’.[n.2]

It is interesting, therefore, that, we hear, in *John* - having enjoyed a brief, miraculous rest-stop in Cana [2:1-12] - He immediately ‘went up to Jerusalem’ and straight to the Temple.

But not to worship.

Not to make sacrifice.

(That wasn’t necessary given His personal sinlessness. [2 Cor. 5:21a])

No, He “sweeps” in and clears the place out.

Bags of money are sent flying.

Tables were flipped over and smashed.

Expensive animals untied and scattered.

This was, argues one author, very straight-forwardly, 'an *assault* on the temple'.[\[n.3\]](#)

A violent attack against it.

*Why?*

That is a great question.

This single act branded Him Public Enemy No. 1.

And for good reason.

The priestly-cult of daily slaughter on Mt. Zion was *big* business.

Indeed, it was the *biggest* business, being at the very *heart* of Jerusalem's economy - and, therefore, of the *entire* country.[\[n.4\]](#)

To grasp the gravity of the act, it may help to imagine - as a close parallel - the impact of a terrorist incident on the trading "floor" at the New York Stock Exchange:

A jihadist with a bomb-belt and some hostages.

The stand-off wouldn't last long:

the authorities - the "market" - couldn't afford for a protracted, convoluted negotiation.

And, similarly, we don't find one in today's gospel reading either.

Now, the meaning of Jesus' disruption is debated, and I'd love to "dig" down into His intention *at some point*.

But *this morning* I want us to pause and observe something obvious, which we yet often ignore; and that is that Jesus was, in this incident, *angry*.

And I mean, *wrathful*.

And there's no hiding from this curious fact, which should unsettle and disturb you:

We're talking, after all, about the person Isaiah calls "the Prince of Peace," [\[9:6\]](#).

But what sort of "peace" does Jesus want to be the prince of?

Ask yourself that.

Is it peace at any cost?

The peace exploited by '[a]n evil and adulterous generation'? [\[Mt. 12:39\]](#)

The peace enforced on others at gun-point by those in ski-masks *or* uniform?

Hardly.

Jesus is, of course, our paradigm of holiness - of the "*good*" life [\[Phil. 2:5; 1 Pet. 2:21\]](#); and what He shows us is that there are some things that are just downright unacceptable, which *must* be confronted.

Now, to be clear, He *isn't* modelling for us (childish) temper-tantrums.

And elsewhere in Scripture we're enjoined to refrain from coarse language [\[Eph. 4:29\]](#) or intemperance [\[Prov. 14:16b\]](#).

He's not contradicting those lessons.

He wouldn't: He came to *fulfil* the law, [Mt. 5:17].

But He is demonstrating that we should be a *passionate* people - one that is *animated* about the mess that the world is in.

Jordan B. Peterson, the controversial Canadian psychologist who seems ubiquitous on The Web just now, *cries* (tears) when he discusses the prevalence of suicide and purposelessness among young, white men (in the West), [n.5].

"*What's gone wrong?!*", he wonders.

And you see that the question isn't just "academic."

It has deeply affected him.

And we too should experience a Christlike *turmoil* about such an unhappy phenomenon.

And about nepotism in the White House [n.6], environmental degradation, the fascistic subversion of free speech by the rise of "no-platforming" [n.7], the mass murder of school-children.

These *trends* shouldn't leave you feeling 'lukewarm'. [Rev. 3:14f.]

Because, explains Saint Paul to Timothy, 'God has not given us a spirit of timidity, *but of power(!)*', [2 Tim. 1:7].

'Be angry', then, (he adds to the Ephesians, [Eph. 4:26a]).

And that's what we see in *this* episode [gesture to the gospel reading], which is urging you to rage *not* in the private comfort of your living-room at the news-anchor on CNN or Fox, but on the street and at the National Mall, and in your community; in your classroom or, if you have one, in your pulpit.

To be *an activist*.

For *this* is what our Saviour was: someone who cared *deeply* about humanity and Creation, and wasn't going to stand idly by.

Rather, He interjected - visibly, *graphically* [See: Jn. 19:16-34].

And this is our "Good News" that we offer the world in word and deed.

Amen.

#### Footnotes:

1. Singer, Robert A. (17th November 2004), 'What Was the Duration of Jesus' Public Ministry? Can a Case Be Made for Two and a Half Years?', 56th Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, San Antonio, T. X., available at <http://www.rsinger777.org/Website%20Update/ETS%20Papers/2%20or%203%20Years.pdf> (accessed March 1, 2018).
2. Smith, Martyn John (May 2015), 'Divine Violence & the Christus Victor

Atonement Model', PhD Thesis, London: Middlesex University/London School of Theology, 80.

3. Ellens, J. Harold (2004), 'The Violent Jesus', in Ellens, J. Harold (Ed.), *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - Volume 3: Models and Cases of Violence in Religion*, Westport, C. T.: Praeger, pp. 15-37, 24.
4. See, for example: Hartman, Gideon, Bar-Oz, Guy; Bouchnick, Ram and Reich, Ronny (December 2013), 'The pilgrimage economy of Early Roman Jerusalem (1st century BCE–70 CE) reconstructed from the  $\delta^{15}\text{N}$  and  $\delta^{13}\text{C}$  values of goat and sheep remains', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, Volume 40, No. 12, pp. 4369-4376.
5. See, for example: 'Alienating Young Men is Deeply Sad - Jordan Peterson - UK Interview 15 01 2018', *Youtube*, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ER1LOarlgg> (accessed March 2, 2018).
6. Sonawane, Vishakha (1st July 2017) 'Is Donald Trump Only US President To Hire Family Members To Administration? A Look At White House Nepotism', *International Business Times*, <http://www.ibtimes.com/donald-trump-only-us-president-hire-family-members-administration-look-white-house-2559811> (accessed March 2, 2018).
7. Bindel, Julie (10th of February 2016), 'Sorry, We Can't Ban Everything that Offends You [Video]', *The Guardian*, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/video/2016/feb/10/sorry-we-cant-ban-everything-that-offends-you-video> (accessed March 2, 2018).