

## Sermon: 2021/03/07 (3rd Sunday in Lent, Year B) - *Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Corinthians 1:18-25; John 2:13-22\_BTR*

[Invite children to the front]

### Kids' Talk: Anger

[Stool/small side-table and a pack of playing-cards.]

Have you ever tried to make a "house of cards"?

[Begin trying to do so.]

It's *really* frustrating.

I just don't know what the "trick" is!

(To get the cards to stand upright.)

Are you suppose to lick them?

Or is that cheating?

*Ugh!* The whole thing makes me so *angry!*

(They just won't stay where I want them.)

[Pause.]

What about you?

Do you ever get *angry*?

Hm?

Yes?

Well so did Jesus.

He was visiting the Temple (in Jerusalem) one day and found that it was *full* of people.

And you'd think that was a good thing, right?

(For the Temple to be "full"?

Just like it would be a good thing to find a church "full".)

*But:* the people that Jesus saw in the Temple weren't there worshipping and glorifying God and learning from His (holy) Scriptures - *oh no.*

*They were there to make money!*

To benefit themselves;

they were there for selfish, *material* reasons.

And so Jesus shouted:

"Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (He said.)

And chased them all out!

Now, unlike you and me Jesus was *perfect*.

And so there's an importance difference between why *He* felt anger and why we *usually* do:

*I* get angry when bad things happen *to me*.

The "house of cards" falling down causes me anger because *I* am embarrassed.

Because it doesn't make *me* look good that *I* can't do it.

Jesus, on the other hand, got angry *only* for *other* people's sakes.

And that's a BIG difference.

In the Temple - for example, you see, He was angry on *God's* behalf.

I think we need to pray -

Let's pray:

Father God, ... In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

## **The Foolishness of Faith**

This morning in Sunday "School" I had reason to quote the famous so-called "New Atheist," Richard Dawkins.

For Richard Dawkins - a name with which I'm sure you're probably (already) familiar, professor of evolutionary biology, famous Oxford University academic and "TV-personality," the Gospel is, as we hear the Apostle Paul say, 'foolishness'.

Indeed, not only is it 'foolishness' but it is *bad*.

Misguided *and* destructive.

Miracles, "The Empty Tomb," the fiery Divine appearance of God on Sinai's peak, which we just heard about in *Exodus* - these events are not just not true, they're *impossible*.

How does he know this?

(Dawkins.)

Was he there?!

Did he see...otherwise?

Has he some...undisclosed evidence in a closet *proving* the Christian's claims false?

No.

None of the above.

What he has - and it is the *only* thing, is a "worldview" that excludes such things happening *on principle*.

*This* is the issue.

*This* is why the Gospel is 'foolishness' to him - and 'foolishness' to the many, *many* influenced by his thinking, and by those like him.

The "worldview" of the atheist;  
the worldview of the "nones" as statisticians call the fast-growing group of young people who find themselves adrift (in this 21st century) without *any* religious conviction; is that the universe is just matter and energy.

Or "strings"! (If you're into "String Theory.")

Matter and energy, or "atoms and agonies" as I put it on the "Ash Wednesday" order-of-service.

And the human creature, according to such a theory, is merely a complex machine; reacting - *always* reacting, *slavishly, mechanically*, to stimuli in its environment.

Cause and effect.

Cause and effect.

And what takes place in the mind, therefore, in the "consciousness" - our "*will*," our emotions and our dreams and our hopes and so on - are merely "shadows;" *illusions*.

Indeed, I've heard it said by an author of no particular, *traditional* religious belief, that people - *all* animal life, in fact - are just vehicles - "delivery systems" for gametes - for sperm and ova, that is.

*Everything* we do - our jobs, our churches, our families - is all just an elaborate "dance" - a pretentious conveyance - for their sake; for bringing them into "union."

They - our gametes - are the "dog," and we - our conversations, our art and experiences, our denominations and political parties - are the "tail" that they "wag."

If *this* is what you believe - or something like this, what room is there, then, to make sense of a "God-man," sacrificing Himself in *great* suffering to expunge humanity's sin?!

And not just that *extraordinary* occurrence, but *all* of the *underlying* concepts and notions "*swirling*" around the crucifixion and the incarnation - concepts like "*justice*," and "*love*," and "*wrath*," and "*sin*," about "*honor*" or "*duty*" or holiness... those *fundamental, foundational* things to the person of the *Christian* faith "don't compute" either to the person who doesn't share it.

It's a predicament, right?

That faces us regularly "out there."

In the queue at Kroger, or in the classroom.

Like we're speaking two different languages that are gobbledygook.

It's a Gordian Knot.

How to deal with it?

Well, any which way you like actually -

The "Gordian Knot" - if you don't know - was a tight mass of tangled rope in the

ancient Kingdom of Phrygia, (in what is today the country of "Turkey").

And it secured a lowly, unimpressive ox-cart to a post, which had been tied there by a king of that place and abandoned.

That king, you see, *had* been a (poor) peasant who'd come to the capital-city to sell his wares in the market, but, by a bizarre and sudden sequence of once-in-a-lifetime events, was suddenly thrust to the throne, and he never returned to collect it.

So, there it remained - the ox-cart - attached to the post by a knot that, supposedly, was a complex family-secret - that poor man's only true wealth, and a legend developed that said whoever could untie it was, then, a rightful heir to the Phrygian crown - because, I suppose, if they knew how to unravel the knot then they must have been given the family's knot-tying secret so as to reverse-engineer it.

And many tried!

Many travelled to Phrygia and pulled on "this" end of the knotted-rope, and then on "that" end, but no one could decipher its many complicated twists and turns; its loops and so on.

So, how to unravel "the Gordian Knot"?

You don't:

it's a mess.

An absurdity.

And so, the legend, goes, Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, whilst campaigning in Asia Minor and building his empire there, came to the town, saw the knot, drew his sword and...*Swipe!* Cut straight through it.

He didn't hesitate.

And we shouldn't either:

For notice how, in the epistle, Paul advocates we should respond to the dilemma we're discussing -

with *no* embarrassment *or* apology.

The "Gordian knot" was *ridiculous* - an ox-cart permanently parked in the middle of the town-square, and everyone having to make a small detour to get round the thing.

It was an obstruction; a public nuisance.

So Alexander did what needed to be done.

What others should have done.

And the Apostle encourages us to act with a similar, "*gutsy*," to-the-point conviction.

Yes, to the non-believer; to the *a*-theist the Gospel seems like 'foolishness'.

Yes, committing oneself to Christ is nonsense under *their* worldview, *but they are perishing*, Paul observes.

Their worldview is callous chaos.

It promises only death.

But we can rescue them!

We can rescue them.

Not by dissembling about the hope that we have;

not by "watering it down" or trying to make it trendy or "cool."

But by unabashedly 'proclaim[ing]' that there *is* a Savior, and He invites *all* to share in a gift of eternal life with Him.

Because who doesn't *actually* want that?

Who isn't looking, *deep* down, for someone to "ride in" and "make right"?

So, let's tell them!

We have, after all, Paul assures us - in his letter to the Corinthians, a 'power' - a 'power' which will 'destroy' - his word - the imagined, *mistaken* 'wisdom' of the person without religion or God.

Their "worldview," you see, is a "strawman." (A scarecrow.)

From afar it looks intimidating - to the crow.

It looks like a scary, hairy farmer.

And the proponents of the *a*-theistic worldview say that their position rests on infallible "science."

But, I tell you, it is *riddled* with assumptions and leaps in logic.

It is a constantly shifting field:

A place of no sure footing -

Yesterday's certainty; yesterday's consensus is today's relic and joke.

The *a*-theistic worldview is a wobbly, fragile "house of cards."

Indeed, consider the "house of cards," for a moment, that I failed to build earlier - what's more likely:

that it appeared and *attempted* to assemble itself, or that there was someone with a mind who desired its existence and creation?

I don't need a PhD to see that the "law of probabilities" favours one explanation much more so than the other.

I just need to be willing to have the conversation with the person who thinks differently; who thinks *erroneously*.

Is that you?

I know you're full of excuses.

I know you're full of self-doubt.

So, trust *the message*.

Trust *Jesus*.