

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 7th March 2021 – Lent 3

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

God welcomes us as we come to worship on this third Sunday in Lent. Today we shall be reminded of the dramatic scenes when Jesus cleared the temple in Jerusalem.

*Come and find the quiet centre
in the crowded life we lead,
find the room for hope to enter,
find the space where we are freed:
clear the chaos and the clutter,
clear our eyes that we can see
all the things that really matter,
be at peace, and simply be.*

(Words by Shirley Erena Murray)

Hymn/Song

Prayer of Praise

Loving God our Father, you are the rock and foundation on which our lives are built. You have made us and called us your children. You love us. We praise and adore you.

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, blessing and honour belong to you. You share in our joys and our sadness. You share in our suffering and pain. You walked the lonely road to the cross and there you died for us that we might be forgiven and be God's friends.

You are alive and present with us now. We praise and adore you.

Holy Spirit, you are the giver of light and life. You make us strong when we feel weak and you help us in our need.

We praise and adore you. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 18-25

John chapter 2 verses 13-22

Prayer of Confession

Jesus, cleanser of temples and souls, at this mid-point in our journey through Lent, look deep within our hearts and our lives and clear away all that holds us back. May our minds, spirits and bodies be a temple that is open to your presence and may our words and our actions be transparent to your love and truth. We pray that this church community will be purified in its life and mission, so that all that we do in and from here may reveal your gospel to others.

In a moment of silence we sit before you and name those things for which we seek your cleansing and healing, so that we may be more faithful disciples.

Silence for reflection & self-examination

Friends of Jesus, we are made clean by the words he has spoken to us. There is room in our lives and in our community for the Holy One to dwell. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song

Sermon

What does your home mean to you? Over the past year we have spent more time at home than ever. At best, home is a place we can make our own, a safe haven, a place we can be ourselves, a gathering space for family and shared hospitality, a place where memories are made. A home tells us a great deal about the person who lives there. Do you remember the TV show 'Through the keyhole'? A panel had to guess the celebrity homeowner. Our home furnishings reflect our personality and reveal what is important to us. What has all this got to do with today's Bible reading?

We heard how Jesus travelled up to Jerusalem for Passover and came to the temple once again. As an infant, Jesus was dedicated at the temple. As a 12-year-old child, Jesus was found by his parents talking with the temple teachers. (Luke 2) Yes, Jesus knew the temple well. For Jesus, the temple represented much more than a place of worship, ritual and sacrifice. It was his Father's house.

As his Father's son, Jesus had a deeper and more spiritual connection to the temple than any other. His very heart was there. Jesus was passionate about the temple being a holy place of prayer and worship, a place where God was honoured, a place of welcome and hospitality, a place of compassion, a place for scriptural teaching, a place of healing, a place where pilgrims could express their love and devotion to God. This is what his temple home meant to Jesus. So Jesus was shocked and angered by the sights and sounds he witnessed at the temple that day. It was clear that the temple was not being used for its proper purpose.

It was the sight of unscrupulous traders exploiting the poor pilgrims for a quick profit, which broke his heart. Jesus could not stand by and watch such disrespect for the poor and disrespect for His Father. Overcome with righteous anger, Jesus did not lose control - he took control. He made a whip (a symbol of authority) and, like a shepherd, he drove out the sheep and cattle from the temple courts. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, no other sacrifice was necessary or greater than Jesus. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers, scattering coins everywhere. It was a clearing out, a cleansing, a de-cluttering. Jesus confronted the culprits with the question "How dare you turn my Father's house into a market"? A confrontation ensued and the leaders demanded a sign from Jesus to prove his authority to act in that way. "Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in 3 days" Jesus replied. He was speaking of his bodily death and resurrection. Jesus redefined and relocated the temple. Jesus spoke of a new, living temple. Because the fullness of God lived in Jesus, he embodied in himself all that the temple should be. Jesus' life and actions displayed the temple ministry of prayer and worship, teaching, welcome and hospitality, compassion, healing, love and devotion. Later, Jesus would affirm, "God is spirit and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth." (John 4:24) The apostle Paul took this further in his teaching 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?' (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Now the spotlight is on us. How shall we apply this episode at the temple to our own lives, to our world situation?

How shall we respond?

Across our world and across our street, the poor are still being exploited. Do we get indignant or angry about such inequality and injustice? Do we act?

Last week the chancellor's Budget reminded us of the ongoing economic crisis we face. Where do our financial priorities lie? Who will pay? Christ stands at the market places and financial houses of today. What sort of protest would Jesus make today? He would enter in to cleanse, to turn the tables and tip the balance. Next, we apply this temple episode to our churches. We are doing church differently today, yet our worship and our service continue. Are we as attached to our physical buildings as we once were? When we rise again out of all this, in what ways will we the people of God be a 'living temple'? Going forward, will passion and zeal for the house of the Lord fire us as it fired Jesus? Lastly, we apply this temple episode to our hearts and our choices. Jesus stands at the entrance of our lives today. What will he find? As God's living temples of the Holy Spirit, is there anything in our life that is out of place? Are there tables that need overturning in our lives? Is there any sin, deceit, pride or greed that Jesus would drive out? Is there clutter that needs clearing? Will we allow Jesus to enter? Will we allow Jesus to cleanse us and change us with his love and grace? The clearing of the temple is never a one off event. I suppose the next day the temple tables were back upright again, the animals back in their pens and the moneychangers back to their old tricks. At the end of his ministry, at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus returned to the temple and cleansed it for a second time. So it is with our hearts. We need a new work of cleansing and renewal. Lent creates a space for God's spring-clean of the heart - our Father's house - that we may find pardon and peace. So today and in these coming weeks let us pray 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me'.

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray for our world broken by persecution, warfare and strife. You desire harmony within and between nations; you yearn for everyone to know security and safety.

Lord of the world and the church: **bring healing and peace.**

Lord of the poor and the rich, we pray for those who live and labour in developing countries paid less than the amount they need to

survive. We commend to your tender love those who are exploited, children who are paid pennies, those who work in sweatshops. You desire justice for all people; you yearn for all people to be treated fairly and equitably.

Lord of the world and the church: **bring healing and peace.**

Lord of the doctor and the patient, we pray for our world at this time of pandemic. We commend to you those who are suffering as a result of Covid-19; those who are working to combat the Brazilian mutation; those who are frightened and stressed out.

You desire wholeness and health for all people; you yearn for an end to the pandemic.

Lord of the world and the church: **bring healing and peace.**

Lord of the chapel and the cathedral, we pray for all places of worship throughout the world. You desire holiness in your children and in the places in which they worship.

Lord of the world and the church: **bring healing and peace.**

Lord of all in need, we bring to you the prayers of our hearts.

We commend to you those about whom we are especially concerned, praying for...

You desire that your children care for one another.

Lord of the world and the church: **bring healing and peace.**

In Jesus' name we pray, **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/Song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

God of justice and mercy, your way commands our obedience; your grace gives us encouragement. Alive with the presence of your indwelling Spirit, we are bold to offer what we have as signs of our devotion, for the sake of Jesus, your gift to us. God be gracious to us and bless us. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- Which room in your house would you like to see de-cluttered?
- How do today's Bible readings speak to your life?
- What sort of protest would Jesus make today?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

O for a heart to praise my God
O breath of life come sweeping through us
O Thou who camest from above

More Contemporary Music:

Purify my heart
Rescuer
I the Lord of sea and sky

Keep social distancing.
Keep safe.
Keep communicating.
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.
My prayers are with you.

With love, Peter