

That isn't the gospel we are used to hearing on Palm Sunday. Why? For years I've heard that the reading of the Passion was added to this day because religious leaders were worried that Christians weren't showing up for the Holy Week services, and they didn't think it was right that people experience the triumphal entry into Jerusalem on this day, and then show up to celebrate the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, and forget the story in between, the betrayal, the desertion, the suffering, the cross, the tomb. I researched this theory and couldn't confirm the rumor, but what I discovered is that Christians have remembered and walked the way of Jesus' passion in many different ways, with many traditions and calendars. What is consistent is that we haven't stopped telling this story, and walking in the way of Jesus and his last days, for two thousand years. I don't think we've forgotten the Passion.

And so I decided not to read the passion today, but to hear one of the stories we miss when we skip from Jesus entering Jerusalem in triumph to his arrest in the Garden on the Mount of Olives on Thursday. Reflecting on the events in between gives us an opportunity to ask the question Why? Why did Jesus' journey turn so sour so quickly?

The cleaning of the temple, which today's gospel reading is called, comes immediately after Jesus enters Jerusalem like a king, with his supporters cheering and the crowds gathered in excitement. First he looks at the city and cries "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!" As citizens of Chicago we recognize that cry, that cry for our home, our despair for our children who shouldn't be fighting for a good education, for an affordable education, or for their own lives, when together we have the resources to make what we enjoy available to everyone.

And then Jesus goes to the temple, the center of their identity and their common life he has a temper tantrum. Or maybe not, maybe this is a planned and strategic act of civil disobedience. In Luke's story he drives out those who are selling things. In Mark he makes a whip to drive out the animals and their sellers, and turns over the tables of the money-changers.

During Wednesday morning reflection we talked about what Jesus' actions mean to us today. If Jesus walked in here today what would enflame his anger? Would he knock over the table of lamb cakes and Easter Candles? sweep to the floor the book of sermons and the art book we are selling? Would it be the Thistle Farm lotions and soaps he'd scatter around?

No! said some folks. Those are donations to the church, no one is profiting off of them. Blessings are free. We aren't selling salvation. We're just trying to keep the lights on.

Then what would Jesus do? Would he sweep the altar of silver chalices, rip off my silk chausable, maul our grand piano and organ and break the stained glass windows? That happened in the reformation. Hopefully we've learned by now that violence against beauty and art isn't true religion either.

So what would Jesus break?

Who are the money-changers of our time? The ones who sell spiritual or physical health for profit? Perhaps it is pastors who ask for donations in exchange for prayers, or promise prosperity to those who give over their hard-earned money. Perhaps it is drug company executives who jack up the price of life-saving drugs far beyond the cost of production, just to make a higher profit.

I winced this week when I received a petition in my email, demanding that Vanguard change voting guidelines so that political spending is disclosed. I winced because St. John's endowment is held by Vanguard and I wonder what our investments support without our knowledge.

And I winced when I went shopping at Target last week, because I bought a few cotton shirts, and they were cheap and I know that almost all the clothes I buy are made by poorly paid workers in countries without strict labor and safety laws, and I could be more conscious about my choices.

Is that what made Jesus so mad?

Maybe. It is certain that Jesus was making a political statement. But instead of criticizing the oppression of Rome, which would certainly have been justified, and what most Jews expected of the Messiah, or any great leader, Jesus turns on the center of Jewish worship and life, the temple, and the system of oppression which abused the poor and the foreigner, and keep people from knowing a loving God. This is what made the religious authorities want to kill him. Jesus exposed the sin and hypocrisy of his own people. This is why Jesus' parade ended in execution.

Perhaps my need to figure out what made Jesus angry, or question what he would break distracts me from what God is trying to say to me today. What about the temple of my body? The Bible says our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. If Jesus looked into my soul today would he be angry? Would there be something he would want to turn over, destroy?

The gospel says the people were spellbound by all that Jesus taught that week in the temple. Was he looking into their souls? Helping them to sweep away the sin and hypocrisy so that nothing could separate them from God?

We've walked with Jesus in the city. We've waved palm branches and sung his praise. Now he stands at the door of our heart. Are we ready to let him in? Are we ready to walk with him to the table, to the garden, to the cross, and to the tomb?