

### Lent 3 John 2:13-22

Probably no-one was more surprised at Jesus' behaviour in the temple than those sitting buying and selling there. It had become normal practice for the marketing side of worship to flourish, and the petty corruption involved was something everyone had come to expect and live with. Jesus would have been familiar with this way of doing things, so what was it that he found so offensive?

One of the hallmarks of Jesus' life was obedience, born of attentive listening to his heavenly father. Understanding the father's longing and will is what was urging him to work for its accomplishment on earth. Lack of obedience, on the other hand, is closely linked with the desire to act independently of God.

Throughout his time of testing in the wilderness, Jesus drew great strength from his obedience to the words of God in scripture. Jesus knew that he had come to fulfil the scriptures, and that full obedience, even when severely challenging, was the only way for this to happen.

In our own society there is very little of an obedience ethic, and the rather distorted image of obedience as being something which mature people can grow out of, as they achieve rational independence.

But Jesus knows that our holiness will only develop in line with our obedience to God and, if we casually break God's law as if it doesn't matter, we will find ourselves weak and unable to withstand temptations when they come. For our own survival spiritually, we need to be rigorous with ourselves; and one of the benefits of our own desert time of Lent is that through our Lenten disciplines we can be strengthened in this way.

What Jesus finds offensive is that God's temple, set apart to be a place of holiness and prayer, is filled instead with buying and selling, profit-making and cheating.

Jesus is attempting to help the temple rulers escape from the practices that had stalled their spiritual development: and it is the same for us. We are familiar with Jesus' saying about the temple of his body; and perhaps we think we are more perceptive than the temple rulers because we know the gospel interpretation.

But we must not rest on our laurels! Our challenge is to look at our own frozen perceptions, religious routines etc and to see Jesus in a fresh and vital way. Obedience to God's law means paying attention to seeing where our priorities need adjusting in our lives, as individuals and as churches, and to strive to keep in step with the God who loves and saves and sets us free to do his will in the world.

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