

In today's gospel reading Jesus drives the dealers and money changers from the temple with a makeshift whip. He is outraged at what is going on in his Father's house. And the Jewish authorities are outraged by the violence of his actions in the holy place of God.

The image of the whip has been taken up by painters down the centuries: Rembrandt, Bernardino Mei, El Greco, Jacob Jordaens and Bassano depict Jesus swinging the cords. In all the paintings he is wearing red to symbolise his anger. What is the cause of this anger?

Well, the money changers in the temple represented a way of worship in which access to the sacred was controlled by the temple authorities. No outsiders were allowed beyond the outer court and no outside money.

Moreover then, as now, the rich were making money out of the poor. The money changers (who exchanged Greek and Roman coins for the Jewish coins needed to pay the temple tax) made excessive profits. Money was also made from the sale of animals for sacrifice.

The story gives us two great clues about Jesus right at the beginning of his ministry. First, he was deeply faithful and observant, but he taught a very different kind of religion. It was one of free and equal access to God for everyone without exception.

The second clue comes from the placement of this story in John's gospel. Unlike the other gospels it comes early on in the second chapter. Jesus is an unknown prophet from Galilee when he comes into the temple turning everything upside down and claiming to be God's son. And it means that he makes powerful enemies right at the beginning of his public ministry. At this stage even the disciples do not understand what Jesus has done.

It is helpful to take this story together with the passage we've just heard from St Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Paul contrasts the wisdom of the

world with the wisdom of God. This is a turning point in the letter and, turns out to be, a turning point in history. Paul's message to the Corinthians about the crucified and risen Lord would have been a scandal – not only for them but also for the Jewish people. No one was expecting a Messiah who would be executed by the Romans.

But in John's gospel, the message about the cross is there at the outset. Jesus himself tells the mixed temple crowd. And St John is emphatic about telling us that the disciples do eventually come to realise that the message of the cross is indeed the power and wisdom of God. But it is only in the light of the resurrection that:

they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken

**Amen**