

Vicar's Sermon

Date : Sun 15/03/2009.
Title : Gentle Jesus.
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Subject : How Jesus took direct action when it was necessary.

"Gentle Jesus meek and mild." Is that the image you have of Jesus? If it is then how do you square that with our reading from the Gospel? Jesus was clearly furious and He let that anger be shown when He made a whip of cords and literally drove out from the Temple all those who were buying and selling.

He didn't say "Excuse me please: you know this kind of thing isn't really acceptable: would you mind moving on please?" He didn't say "Let's have a meeting about this and discuss it." He turned the tables over with everything on them: shekels would have been scattered on the dirty pavements: pigeons flying in the air: men shouting and cursing: Jesus shouting even louder: visitors running for cover: the Temple guards racing to the scene like modern security men: the disciples feeling sick and wondering where it was all going to end and the whole scene in uproar and clouds of dust! "Gentle Jesus meek and mild? I don't think so!

What happens when we lose our temper over something that is clearly wrong and try to do something about it? Some well meaning person comes along and says "you shouldn't really have done that you know: this kind of thing can only lead to trouble and you really should have sat down and discussed it like sensible adults: have you not thought about the implications of what you've done?" There were certainly implications in this and not only for Jesus. Those buyers and sellers in the Temple were making a living albeit no doubt a dishonest one in most cases and overcharging visitors for their goods. Jesus was threatening their livelihoods. Also the Temple was a mecca for the tourist trade and how would visitors react to a scene like this? The Jerusalem Tourist Board must have been in uproar!

And then there's the fact that violence gets you nowhere or at least it gets you somewhere where you don't necessarily want to be. It got Jesus to the Cross because there is no doubt that this incident increased the determination of the Temple authorities to get rid of Him at all costs. Jesus' journey to Calvary took a big step forward at this point. But Jesus wasn't thinking about Himself and His own security: He certainly wasn't considering His reputation: here He was, this wise, humble and loving man who had reached out to hundreds of people and healed them with just a touch of His hands and those same hands were now suddenly wielding a whip, overturning tables and gesticulating wildly and out of control.

What effect would this have on His popularity and ministry: "Well, have you heard what He did? I always knew there were two sides to Him! He can be a nasty piece when He wants to be! If that's what it means to be a disciple then I certainly don't want to be one! Why didn't He just sit down with the money changers and sort it out peacefully: they want their heads banging together! Well, I for one am certainly not going there again even though I never went in the first place!"

You see where losing your temper gets you? I'll bet you anything that many of those who watched Him being crucified were people who had been there that day in the Temple seeing Him get His just desserts.

But the truth is that Jesus wasn't a people pleaser but a God follower who was more concerned about Truth and Honesty before God than He was courting popularity or keeping the peace.

The trouble with us is that we're too damned reasonable and we so often settle for a quiet life rather than truly challenge people to follow in the ways of God. A peaceful life is so often a compromised life in which we turn a blind eye to injustices, wrong doings, wrong attitudes, hypocrisies and falsehoods: all so that we can live our lives peacefully and uninterrupted in our little cosy cocoons. And all the while in this apparent haven of peace and tranquillity the divisions

grow, resentments increase and ungodliness continues rather like a peaceful ocean awaiting a tsunami.

And that's the peace that we so often have in the Church because our leaders at all levels don't have the guts to say when something's wrong. There's a well known phrase that is applicable to society as a whole but certainly applies to church "all it needs for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing!" Well, Jesus was not one of those good men because at the risk of His reputation and His life He did do something and He spoke out boldly against hypocrisy and wrong doing.

But before we send Him on an anger management course perhaps we should ask ourselves the question "should we be doing the same?"

Amen.

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