

North West Wiltshire Pastorate
Sunday March 7th – Lent 3

Welcome and Opening words

Welcome to our service today, for the third Sunday in Lent.

This Sunday marks the halfway point so I ask, ‘How is Lent working out for you?’

If you had planned Lent, are those plans still in place?

If your approach to lent this year is more organic, is that proving successful or are you not sure?

And if, like me your decision was to be gentle with yourself and not place yourself under any further pressure – is that working?

Lent is a time of questions, but it is also, as Andrew Platt reminds us in his hymn, a time of love.

*Love inspired the anger
That cleared a temple court,
Overturned the wisdom
Which their greed had wrought.*

*Love inspires the anger
That curses poverty,
Preaches Life's enrichment,
Seeks equality.*

*Love inspires the anger
That still can set us free
From the world's conventions
Bringing liberty.*

Let us worship God.

Our hymn today is ‘Show me how to stand for justice.’

A Prayer

Eternal God,
at the start of this day, set apart and sacred
we come to worship.
We are joined virtually
and by the bonds of long-standing friendship.

As we give this time to you,
to your word,
and we make our response,
we seek to remove from our minds
all that may hinder clarity and restrict
what you ask of us.
Bless our offering,
whatever imperfections it contains,
know that it is rooted in love,
as we are rooted in our love of you.
Amen.

Our reading today comes from John, chapter 2, verses 13-22, Jesus clears the Temple.

A Prayer of Confession

This comes from the URC Prayer handbook for today.

Let us pray

*Lord, you know our hearts and minds
we don't need fancy words to speak to you
we don't need fine clothes to meet with you.*

*When we put conditions on how to worship,
when the instruction manual becomes our gospel,
when we put obstacles in the path of those who
would come to you.*

Forgive us.

*Your anger in the temple shows us how much you care:
that everyone is welcome
that you are wherever we are.*

*You are love unlimited, always accessible.
We are grateful that we can turn to you
in the dead of night; from the depths of our lowest moments,
and know we will find love, understanding, comfort
and acceptance, just as we are.
Amen*

Some thoughts

*It was the same, year after year,
every Temple visit he saw the same thing –
and it sickened him,
and it made him angry,
but now he could do something about it.*

*Bonhoeffer said that ‘people who love are the most revolutionary people on earth’
and what happened here – was borne out of love,
there was anger as well, but it was sorrowful anger,
anger at what this had become, which was not what it had intended.
It could not be business as usual,
and what was happening here was very much ‘business’
where was God?*

*That same God who was their reason for being at the Temple,
a place of worship, not a market-place.
A place of prayer that needed to be purged
and restored to its true purpose.
A place for Passover where God had been passed -over
In favour of making a profit.
It was Jesus’ love of the Father and his love for the people
that drove him to act as he did,
it was a righteous anger borne out of love and sorrow
at what the Temple had become.*

*“You have to change; you have to become more God-focussed”
less self, more sacrificial,
less profit motivated, more people motivated.*

*Church and market have often collided,
but rarely colluded;
The church frowns on money making enterprises,
but keeps a watchful eye on the interest rate
of the deposit account.
As congregations we acquire much,
but are loathe to clear out, ‘just in case.’*

*The Jews saw the Temple as the spot where heaven and earth touched,
imagine their horror at the threat of its destruction,*

*but imagine the joy that would be theirs
in finding and knowing each other as the body of Christ.*

*But they had to let go-
de-clutter, re-focus,
evaluate and understand,
and leave behind, strip back
all that put a barrier between them and God.*

*Love and anger are closely linked;
The cathartic aspect of loving anger
Is not to be underestimated.
Read those verses once again;
imagine Jesus walking into our church buildings.
what would his reaction be?
Amen*

We continue our worship with Bruce Springsteen's *Rocky Ground*.
Before you wonder where I am going with this, please listen to the words in the light of our gospel today.

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray,
We've been travelling over rocky ground,
Lord, this is a bumpy road and for some, too much right now.
We pray for all who are just about hanging on.

Rise up shepherd, your flock has roamed far,
*Lord, we think of those lost, who don't see the church
as having the answers, even though they themselves don't know the questions.*

Jesus said the money changers in this temple will not stand,
*In this week of the budget, we pray for those who hoped and were disappointed,
for all who worry about stretching limited money even further,
and those who once again believe themselves forgotten.*

You raise your children, teach them to walk straight and sure.
*As schools return tomorrow,
we pray for all children, teachers and parents,*

and all the emotions currently felt.

Hard times come no more,
*We pray for all who trust and hope and believe
that better days lie ahead and proclaim that belief
encountering disbelief in return.*

You pray for guidance only silence meets your prayers,
we've been travelling over rocky ground,
*Living Lord, in your time not ours,
by your grace, not ours;
by no rights of our own, but through your love
we make these prayers.*
Amen.

Blessing

Go into the world and speak with courage,
Go into the world and act compassionately,
Go into the world and encourage those you call 'neighbour';
Go into the world and witness as Christ intended.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Be with you,
Now and always,
Amen.