



Week Two

The Temple: Risking Righteous Anger

Open the Gathering with Prayer ~ Choose your own or read Psalm 84 responsively.

Gathering Prompt – *choose one invitation to start connecting with each other and the week's themes.*

- When have you witnessed or experienced righteous anger? What were the circumstances? What made you label it as “righteous”?
- Invite people to share an image or photo of the inside of a sanctuary. It can be an image of the inside of the church they attend, a church they've visited, or an image they found online. What do you see that is beautiful in the image? What seems “ordinary”? Does anything seem out-of-place? What might someone who is not familiar with Christianity remark about the sanctuary?

Overview – *a short summary of the chapter to remind participants of the main themes.*

Story ~ Jesus enters the temple in Jerusalem and drives out the vendors. In doing so, he draws the attention of the chief priests and scribes who, Mark tells us, “look for a way to kill him” (11:18).

Religious Context ~ The temple in Jerusalem was an enormous complex about the size of twelve soccer fields. It was not a calm and quiet place. It was a house of prayer, but also a pilgrimage site, a tourist attraction, a place to discuss matters of local and religious concern, the national bank, a place for vendors to sell their wares, and the only place in the Jewish world where sacrifices could be made.

Scriptural Precedent ~ In Mark's telling of this story, Jesus references two significant passages from Hebrew Scriptures: Isaiah 56:6–7 (house of prayer for all nations) and Jeremiah 7:11 (den of robbers).

Levine argues that Jesus' proclamation is less about what the vendors were doing (money changing was normal in the temple and there is no evidence that people were being cheated) and more about the spirit out of which people were engaging in temple life. A den of thieves is not where robbers engage in the act of thieving; it is the place they go to feel safe afterwards. Jesus'

comment was meant to draw attention to God's desire for worshippers to live out the tenets of their faith all the time and in all aspects of their life, not just in the when at the temple.

Significance ~ Sometimes people mistakenly read this story as Jesus condemning the whole institution of the temple. Jesus' concern was not to do away with the temple. His concern was with people having the right attitude when they entered the temple. Are we going through the rituals of religious life but not really changing our ways? When we enter sacred spaces are we doing so in a spirit of praise, repentance, reconciliation, and compassion?

Inquiry – *initial questions, thoughts, new ideas arising out of the reading.*

- What details about the temple and temple life that Levine details in this chapter were new or interesting to you? How have these details enriched or shaped your understanding of what Jesus said and did when he was driving out the vendors? What has challenged you? Did anything make you think about something in a new way or make you feel uncomfortable? If so, what and why? What, if any, new questions came to mind?
- If you put yourself in this story, where are you? What draws your attention? What might you think / feel about Jesus words and actions if you were there?

Scripture – *re-read a key scripture passage together.*

Read **Mark 11:15-19** (NRSV) – the translation Levine uses in the book (p. 45).

AND

Read **John 2:13-21** (NRSV) – the translation Levine uses in the book (p. 46).

Discussion – *questions related to the scripture passage.*

Levine encourages us to see the differing details in each of the gospel accounts as an exciting opportunity to hear the same story from different perspectives. She argues that we should celebrate rather than attempt to reconcile or harmonize the differences.

In this spirit, take time to compare the differences between the gospel accounts of this story from Mark and John. Copy the stories from the same version of the Bible and compare them side by side.

- Highlight in one colour the details that are unique in Mark and in John.
- Highlight in another colour the details in each gospel that are the same?
- What features of temple life are highlighted?
- What words does Jesus use?
- What actions does Jesus take?
- What is the tone of each passage?

What do we learn about Jesus and his mission by looking closely at two different perspectives on this story? What do these stories contribute to our understanding of the overall passion narrative?

Are you noticing anything about the different themes that each gospel writer focuses on? What

appear to be their interests? What different points are made by each gospel writer's choice of detail and perspective? What would we be missing if we only had one version? How do these differences enrich our understanding of our faith?

John writes about Jesus' body as the new temple. Given what we've learned about the temple in Jerusalem from this story, why is this a significant detail? Why would "Jewish follower of Jesus take comfort in this idea" (p. 61)?

Living Practices – *practices connected to the theme for participants to engage in between sessions.*

"During Lent you have the opportunity to think about your life alongside the life of Jesus, inviting inward transformation and then outward action" (Levine, p. 13).

Pursuing Justice ~ In this story, we witness Jesus expressing righteous anger. Levine reminds us that not all anger is sinful; anger against systemic evils, such as hypocrisy, exploitation, and harassment, is often necessary. Our anger towards injustice should spur us to action as it did for Jesus in this story, but Levine is clear to note that "righteous anger seeks restitution, not revenge; it seeks correction, not retribution" (51).

- What is an injustice that makes you angry? Spend time this week on a fact-finding mission about that issue. What are the causes and manifestations of the injustice? Visit The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Social Action Hub (presbyterian.ca/justice/social-action/) to see if there are any topics highlighted on the page that interest you. If so, read what the church has said, done and suggests that people might do to take action. What one step will you take towards restitution and correction with regards to this injustice?
- In her chapter on justice as a spiritual practice, Adele Ahlberg Calhoun writes: "Issues of injustice consistently involve allocation of real and substantive resources: money, time, opportunities, goods, services. [. . .] We are stewards of what God has given us. God holds us responsible for what we have" (219-220).
Consider your responsibility before God for what you've been given. What gifts and resources do you have? How could you share them with others and use them to pursue justice?

Close the Gathering with Prayer ~ *Choose your own or say the Lord's prayer together.*

