

Both of our readings from the New Testament today talk about overturning. The gospel from John, I think, is a rather unsettling reading. There's no reference in it to Jesus's emotional state, but it would appear that he's angry in this story, if not enraged by what he finds in the temple. He arrives in Jerusalem, goes up to the temple and discovers that it's become a marketplace. There were people selling animals and others changing money. There were people making a tidy profit from the practice of religion. They'd managed to commercialize faith, and Jesus doesn't like it.

He doesn't ask them to leave politely. He made a whip of cords and drove them out, overturning the tables of the money changers. "Stop making my father's house a marketplace," he says. Now we're not told the volume at which Jesus was speaking in this passage, but my guess is he's speaking fairly loud, if not shouting. As I've said, it's a challenging story. What makes me as an Englishman particularly uncomfortable is the reference to Jesus's zeal. In England, we're trained to be suspicious of all enthusiasm, much more comfortable with cynicism. So, the zeal that Jesus shows in this story I find particularly hard to fathom.

This is not the meek and mild of our Sunday school stories. The meek and mild Jesus. Jesus is no protector of the status quo. He has no interest in propping up institutions of faith that elevate comfort and complacency over justice and holiness. What we see in this story is Jesus as a disruptor, a leveler, an over-turner literally.

So, what can we learn from this story as we move deeper into Lent? Perhaps we might begin by asking ourselves how we react to this story. How do we feel about Jesus's posture, language, tone and actions in the temple? Are we offended by his anger, his actions, his zeal? If we are, then why? What cherished version of God, church, piety or worship, do we see threatened in this story? Then what are we passionate about when it comes to our faith? What are we most inclined to defend or protect or hoard? What are we zealous about as members of the body of Christ? Is zeal even on the radar or have we settled for a way of being Christian that's more safe, more casual and comfortable, rather than disorienting, challenging, transformative, and missional?

Then when we turn to the Epistle from Corinthians, we see Paul describing how God has overturned the wisdom of the world. God says that Paul has made foolish the wisdom of the world, and he goes on to use an amazing phrase, "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom". What does it mean to talk about God's foolishness? Well, I don't think he's suggesting that God is actually foolish, rather that his ways can appear foolish to our way of

thinking. The greatest example of this is the cross, which is the central element of this service as we take communion together, which is at the center of our thoughts as we lead up in this Lent to the events of Easter.

This passage begins, "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to those who are being saved, it is the power of God." The word foolishness here is a Greek word that is the root of our English word absurd. As a preacher, I'm very aware of the absurdity of the message of the cross which I'm called to preach, that the death, the execution of this man 2000 years ago, still makes a difference to us today. I'm very mindful that appears absurd.

When I was a young priest, I struggled to make sense of it, and I felt it was my job to get into the pulpit and explain the cross, that I had to help people understand how the cross and the crucifixion still makes a difference to us all these years later. Now, I feel the need simply to present the message of the cross, rather than explain it. The message I'm called to preach is that God was at work in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to bring about our salvation. That's the message I'm called to preach and present. The truth of the message is to be experienced as much as it is to be understood.

Notice that Paul draws a contrast here in the reading between the cross as foolishness to those who are perishing and the cross as the power of God to those who are being saved. So, it's human foolishness and God's power which are held up as opposites. I've come to learn that we don't have to fully understand what was going on in the cross to experience its power. T.S. Eliot says, "All our knowledge only brings us closer to our ignorance and all our ignorance closer to death, but closer to death, no nearer to God."

We need to overturn our thinking and embrace God's knowledge, God's wisdom, God's perspective, God's power. So there's lots to ponder in our two challenging readings today, which is good because at this time of year in the season of Lent, we're called to ponder and reflect on our life and life's big questions. What are we enthusiastic about? Have we experienced the power of the cross of Christ? Are we ready to have our lives overturned? Could we try turning some things over? We could turn over our sadness and be full of gratitude and praise. We could turn over our hurting words and say kind words. We could turn over our pessimism and be filled with hope. We could turn over our worries and have trust in God. We could turn over our complaints and contemplate simplicity. We could turn over our grudges and be reconciled. This Lent may we turn over our lives to a God who overturns everything. Amen.