

Both of our readings today involve overturning. The Gospel from St. John is a rather unsettling reading. There's no reference in it to Jesus's emotional state, but it would appear that He's angry, if not enraged in this story 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 there and lots of money changers. There were people making a tidy profit from the practice of religion. They've managed to commercialize faith, and Jesus clearly doesn't like it.

Now Jesus 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 said, and we're not told as to the volume of which Jesus said that, but my guess is it was fairly loud.

As I said, it's a challenging story. What makes me particularly uncomfortable, as an Englishman, is the reference to Jesus's zeal here. I'm not trained as an Englishman to be particularly enthusiastic. That's not a quality that we really go for. We're much more comfortable with cynicism, sadly.

So zeal is way beyond my comfort level, but Jesus here is showing us the disciples recognized a zeal for His Father's house. This is not the meek and mild Jesus of Sunday school. Jesus is no protector of the status quo. Jesus has no interest in propping up institutions of faith that elevate comfort and complacency over holiness and justice. What we see in this story is Jesus as a disruptor, a leveler, an overturner, literally.

What can we learn from this story as we move deeper into the holy season of Lent? Perhaps one exercise for this week would be to ask ourselves honest questions about our reaction to this story as we hear it again. How do we feel about Jesus's posture, emotion, language, tone, and His actions in the temple? Are we offended? What about His zeal? If we're offended, then why? What cherished

version of God, church, piety, or worship does Jesus threaten in this narrative?

And then there's another question. What are we passionate about when it comes to our faith? What are we most inclined to defend, to protect, to hoard? What are we zealous for as members of the Body of Christ? Is zeal even on the radar anymore, or have we settled for a way of being Christian that is more safe, rote, casual, and comfortable? And have we lost that challenge, challenging transformative, missional edge to our faith?

So, questions to consider during Lent, and now I'd like to invite us to turn to the epistle reading where we see St. Paul describing how God has overturned the wisdom of the world. "God," St. Paul says, "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." "God's foolishness." What an incredible turn of phrase that is. What can it possibly mean?

Well, I'm not sure he's suggesting that God really is foolish, rather that His ways could appear foolish to our way of thinking. And the greatest example of this is the Cross. The passage begins, "The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God." And the word "foolishness" here comes from the root of the Greek word that's being used which is the word for absurd. And as a preacher, I'm very aware of the absurdity of the message of the Cross which I'm called to preach. How can the execution of one man save the world?

When I was a young priest, I used to struggle to make sense of it. I felt as if it was my job to get into the pulpit and explain it. I had to help people understand how the crucifixion of Jesus still makes a difference to us all these years later. Now I feel the need, more simply, to present the message of the Cross, to present it rather than to 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. And the truth of that

message is to be experienced as much as it is to be understood.

Notice that St. Paul draws the contrast here between the Cross' "foolishness" to those who are perishing and the Cross' the power of God to those who were being saved. The contrast is between human "foolishness" and God's power. Those are the things that are being set as opposites. I've come to learn that we don't have to fully understand what was going on 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 these readings which is good because at this time of year in Lent, we set aside time to ponder, think, and reflect. What are we enthusiastic about? Have we experienced the power of the Cross of Christ?

Whilst we might not be ready to have our lives overturned, we could try turning some things over.

We could turn over our sadness to be filled with gratitude.

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 cynicism and be enthusiastic.

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 the God who overturns everything.

Amen.