A-J Study – Week 2

**Session 2 THE TEMPLE:**

**RISKING RIGHTEOUS ANGER**

**Session Goals**

As a result of conversations and activities connected with this session, group members should begin to

* understand the different emphases that the Gospels attach to the Temple incident; •
* appreciate the role of the Temple in Jewish and Christian thought;
* consider how Jesus’ actions in the Temple can be used to challenge notions of hospitality, grace, the role of money in contemporary churches, and the problems that happen when churches are places where sinners feel relaxed rather than repentant; and
* develop strategies for turning feelings of anger at injustice into action.

**Scriptural Foundation**

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” Mark 11:15-17

Special Preparation [for onsite groups]

Prepare the room with seating arranged in a circle so that everyone will be able to see one another.

* Create a small worship space in the centre of the circle with visual reminders of God’s presence. For this session, that could include a whip and some scattered coins (preferably coins from other nations, such as euros, sen, yen, and pesewas). •​Have available paper, pens, pencils, and other drawing materials.
* Also have available Bibles for those who may not have brought one.
* Prepare two pieces of paper or card stock. On one write the words: A House of Prayer for All Nations. On the other write: A Den of Robbers. Post the signs in a visible place in your meeting area.
* If you have access to Bible dictionaries, have them available for participants to use.
* Prepare a chart on a large, blank sheet of paper. The chart should have three columns and five rows. The heading for the second column should say “Mark” and the heading for the third column should say “John.” In the first column, beginning with the second row write the following, each in its own cell: ​Where in Gospel ​What Jesus does ​What Jesus says ​Result
* Post a large, blank sheet of paper in a visible, accessible spot in your meeting space.

**Opening Activity** Read aloud Isaiah 56:6-8 (NRSV)

**6**And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,  
    to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,  
    and to be his servants,  
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,  
    and hold fast my covenant—  
**7**these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
    and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices  
    will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
    for all peoples.  
**8**Thus says the Lord God,  
    who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather others to them  
    besides those already gathered.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+56%3A6-8&version=NRSVA#fen-NRSVA-18762a)]

Thinking about **“A House of Prayer for All Nations.”**

Ask:

* What does this way of describing the Temple imply for how we should act toward people who are not members of our church? to people who are not Christians? to people who are of different ethnicities?
* What parts of our church life help us live into being “A House of Prayer for All Nations”?

Now invite the group to reflect silently on these additional questions:

* With whom do we, as individuals and as this church, need to be reconciled?
* How is God’s embrace of those have a different way of worshiping than we do good news for us?

**Opening Prayer**

God of the Passover,

who brought to freedom those who passed through the waters of the Red Sea,

and raised again to life Jesus from the dead,

We look for your reconciling love that makes us one,

and we long for the courage to risk living out of that love.

Bless us now as we gather around your Living Word. Amen.

Play the **Video** – Session 2 (8-10 mins)

**Explore the Meaning of the Temple**

The Temple was an important site for the Jewish people in Jesus’ time, including the followers of Jesus such as Peter and Paul. Let’s explore what it meant and continued to mean.

1. Who was welcome at the Temple?
2. Why were there vendors at the Temple?
3. How did Jesus’ followers feel about the Temple?
4. What was the environment like in the Temple during the Passover? (for example, noisy v. quiet)

What further questions do you bring about the Temple?

Divide into 2 groups

1. Luke 19:45-48
2. John 2:13-22

Each group reads their passage with the following questions:

* Where does this passage appear in the Gospel [that is, near the beginning, middle, or end]?
* What does Jesus do in this passage?
* What does Jesus say?
* What is the result of this incident?

When the groups come back

* How do the accounts differ? How are the similar?
* What does each account contribute to our picture of the Temple?
* What does each account contribute to our picture of Jesus?

**Consider Caiaphas** [extract from Chapter 2, A-J]

Have someone read the following:

… Caiaphas’s job was to keep the peace. Because Judea is under direct Roman rule and there is no ruling king, Caiaphas represents the people of Judea to Rome. He is appointed, as were other high priests since Rome took over Judea completely in 6 CE, by the Romans and serves at their pleasure. More, the Roman governor keeps control of the high priestly vestments, so Caiaphas can only do his job if Pilate lets him.

Caiaphas is basically between a rock and a hard place. He is the nominal head of Judea, and he is supposed to keep the peace. Judea is occupied by Rome, and Roman soldiers are stationed there. Caiaphas needs to make sure that these soldiers do not go on the attack. He needs to placate Pilate, and he needs to placate Rome.

At the same time, as the High Priest, he has a responsibility to the Jewish tradition. Rome wanted the Jews to offer sacrifices to the emperor. The emperor was considered to be a god, but Caiaphas and the other Jews refused to participate in this type of offering because they would not worship the emperor. The most they were willing to do was offer sacrifice on behalf of the emperor and the empire.

Caiaphas also has to put up with Pilate, the prefect of Judea and representative of Rome. Pilate raided the Temple treasury in order to build the aqueduct, but that was money that was supposed to have been used for Temple expenses, including to help support people who used the Temple or needed food.

When Jesus comes into the city in the Triumphal Entry, when people are hailing him as son of David, Caiaphas recognizes the political danger. The Gospel of John tells us that the people wanted to make Jesus king (John 6:15). Caiaphas has to watch out for the mob. Caiaphas also has to watch out for all these Jewish pilgrims coming from all over the empire celebrating the Feast of Freedom, the end of slavery. When he sees Roman troops surrounding the Temple Mount, Caiaphas has to keep the peace. And Jesus is a threat to that peace. But none of this has to do directly with Jesus’ actions in the Temple. He is not at this point protesting Caiaphas’s role.

Have we ever had to give up our own privilege or rights for the sake of the group? Any examples?

How do our responsibilities sometimes prevent us from risking a more courageous option?

**Consider Churches and Conflict** [extract from Chapter 2, A-J]

Have someone read the following:

Jesus continues, “But you are making it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:13). Here he is quoting Jeremiah 7:11: “Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight?” A “den of robbers” (sometimes translated a “den of thieves”) is not where robbers rob. “Den” really means “cave,” and a cave of robbers is where robbers go after they have taken what does not belong to them, and count up their loot. The context of Jeremiah’s quotation—and remember, it always helps to look up the context of citations to the Old Testament—tells us this. Jeremiah 7:9-10 depicts the ancient prophet as condemning the people of his own time, the time right before Babylonians destroyed Solomon’s Temple over five hundred years earlier: “Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are safe!’—only to go on doing all these abominations?”

Levine, Amy-Jill. Entering the Passion of Jesus [Large Print] (pp. 56-57). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Discussion:

* Why does Jesus disrupt the comfort many people experienced in the Temple?
* What are the challenges our church faces in welcoming people who are not already “insiders”?
* How could we welcome people more fully?
* How does our church worship and church life call us to be transformed by God’s grace?

**Consider Church and Offering**

* How did you experience the time of Offering in Church onsite?
* How do you experience it online and Direct transfer or sending in?
* Do the words or actions of dedication make a difference?
* What are we communicating about the role of money in our lives and in the church by the way we are practicing Offering?
* What might a non-churched visitor think about the rituals surrounding the offering? (method, plates, music, prayers, etc…)
* How do we make rich and poor feel welcome in our church?
* In what ways are we challenged to reflect on how we use money in other parts of our lives?
* In what ways are we challenged to think about how the church uses money taken up in the collection?

**Turn Anger into Action**

Have someone read the following:

In all cases but especially in John’s Gospel, Jesus appears violent. We might think of his action in terms of righteous anger or even holy anger. There are times, we may find, that business as usual is not only inappropriate, it is obscene. Something has to be done. If we do not become angry when we see images of suffering children, if we do not feel some sort of rage when preventable tragedies occur, if we do not feel compelled to act, then something has gone terribly wrong, with us.

Some of my students insist that anger is a sin. I think whether it is a sin depends on the type of anger we manifest. It is true that the “wrath” is among the classical “seven deadly sins” (the others are pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, and sloth). But “wrath” here refers to a temper out of control, to rage, and so to hate and the desire for revenge. That is not the same thing as righteous anger. Righteous anger seeks restitution, not revenge; it seeks correction, not retribution.

We can see the different types of anger manifested in the Gospels: Jesus forbids anger against a person. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:22), he states, “I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, ‘You fool,’ you will be liable to the hell of fire.” The anger he forbids is anger against another person. But he does not forbid anger against systemic evils: hypocrisy, exploitation, harassment, molestation, drug pushing, and so on. Such forms of injustice should make us angry, and that anger should lead to constructive action.

It seems to me that Jesus, in the Temple, was angry. But what so angered him? I hear from a number of people, whether my students in class or congregations who have invited me to speak with them, that the Temple must have been a dreadful institution; that it exploited the poor; that it was in cahoots with Rome; that Caiaphas, the High Priest in charge of the Temple, was a terrible person; that it banned Gentiles from worship and so displayed hatred of foreigners; and so forth. A few suggest that there was a “Temple Domination System” that represented everything wrong with society. Some tell me that the Temple imposed oppressive purity laws that forbade people from entering, and so Jesus, who rejected those laws, rejected the Temple as well. No wonder Jesus wanted to destroy the institution.

Levine, Amy-Jill. Entering the Passion of Jesus [Large Print] (pp. 51-52). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

This exercise can be done in pairs or a couple of people might share:

* Have you ever felt angry in a way that you later regretted?
* If you had your time over, how would you have preferred to have acted?

Discussion

* when does anger become problematic or sinful?
* When is it appropriate to disrupt someone else’s comfort because of our anger?
* How can we turn our anger into actions that do not hurt but help?

*Give people a chance to reflect on a situation in the world that makes them angry or disturbs their moral conscience. Ask them to take a few moments to consider the following questions:*

* Who needs to have their comfort disturbed in order to address this situation?
* What would I have to risk in order to address this situation?
* What is one thing I could do this week to move toward changing this situation?

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