

My father was known as a friendly and good natured man. He was gentle, soft spoken, and a generally kind person. He was a farmer, and a good one, and it seemed to me, when I was a young person that he never got upset about anything. That included the farm machinery I broke, the tractors I got mired in the mud... nothing ruffled his feathers. But one day when I was a teenager something happen that made me realize there was another side to this peaceful man, yes, even my father could get angry. It was a summer day, soon after school was out. I was riding in the passenger seat of our pickup with Dad one day on our way back to the farm, and as we approached the farm from a distance we could see someone walking along the shoulder of the road, hitchhiking, a couple cars went by him....no ride.....and when he started to walk in front of our house the family dog came out and began barking at him. No one tied their dogs in those days, certainly not on a farm, so the dog was barking at him as he passed by in front of our house.....good dog... guarding the property. As we are watching this hitchhiker, he reaches down to

the ground picks up a handful of rocks and starts throwing them at the family dog. Imagine that! We approach this scene in the truck, Dad starts to pull over and says “Carl roll down your window” and he pulls over to a stop next to the hitchhiker. Only then I realize that my father is really angry, And he motions to this young man and he says “Come over here.” And the kid, who isn’t much older than me comes to the truck window with a look of absolute terror in his eyes, and my Dad leans over me to get as close to this kid as he can and he says “ If I EVER catch you throwing rocks at my dog again, I’ll skiver you.” Even now I’m not really sure what he meant by this, but I am absolutely sure THAT was a threat.

So what are we to make of this reading from the Gospel of John? This Jesus in the Temple is not the kind and gentle Jesus we like to remember. This is an angry fellow, and a violent event. He is overturning tables and using some sort of whip to drive the animals out of the temple. that seems out of character for the Prince of Peace. or is it?

In this story Jesus is offended by what is going on in the temple....His father's house, Jesus is at his most righteous, he is fulfilling his role as prophet. he sees something that is wrong and he takes matters in his own hands to correct it. . The temple is being used for purposes other than what it was intended for—worship of the Father by all people. Historically, from what I understand The Jerusalem temple was divided into several courts. The outer court, around the edges, was open to everyone, Jews or non-Jews, the Gentiles, the Greeks, this space was used for selling of animals destined for sacrifice and for exchanging foreign currency for the appropriate coins needed to pay the annual Temple tax. Jesus is angry that the merchants are robbing Israel through inflated rates of exchange and robbing the Gentiles of the opportunity to worship and pray> His anger is justified. The accepted business practice of the Temple was at odds with God's law—that is the law we heard about in our story of Moses earlier. Jesus is making right the law of Moses. There is thievery going on here, and people being excluded where they should all be welcome.

The temple of Jerusalem at that time could be compared to a human soul when it is still rough around the edges , filled but with earthly and senseless attachment. As we live our faith, and encounter Christ through our sacraments and through each other, we undergo our conversion. Christ expels the rough stuff around our edges— for us—and we are better able to know Him and better able to worship the Father. You could say that as we are converted to Christ our identity as children of God becomes clearer to us. We begin to realize and accept who we are. And as we accept who we are we become more open to God's grace.

In a broader symbolic sense we can say that Jesus's administering of justice in the Temple is a statement for everyone that God's grace isn't for sale...sure the buying and selling going on in the temple is wrong, but what's behind this outburst from Jesus is him telling us that we can't buy grace, we don't need to bargain for it by sacrificing a couple of turtle doves or anything else. Truly we don't have to do anything to be

worthy of God's loving kindness and his forgiveness. It has been
have it given to us as our birthright, our birthright as children of
the Father. We believe that God's grace is free, a no strings
attached gift to each us and to all of creation. Gods grace is
endless mercy and forgiveness, boundless goodwill and love. All
we need to do is accept this and be open to it. When we are
comfortable in our identity, the law of the Lord becomes the path
to grace— as in today's Psalm then "The law of the Lord is perfect,
refreshing the soul. These are great words for us to hear now as a
help on our Lenten journey.