

All four gospels include this oft illustrated story of Jesus overturning tables. Matthew, Mark, and Luke put the story right before the crucifixion – one of the reasons people get angry at Jesus. He shows anger at systems that harm.

Only John places this cleansing of the temple early. In the 4th gospel it's Jesus' inaugural public appearance. He's been quietly behind the scene at a wedding, but now he's upfront, loud, and in their faces. This gospel wants us to have no illusion about what it means to follow Jesus. It's not about never being angry.

In his blog this week, Richard Rohr includes some one-liners on anger.

—*Barbara Holmes* - A healthy expression of righteous anger can change communal despair into compassionate action.

—*Danté Stewart* – Love dancing with rage, rage dancing with love, becomes a great spiritual, moral, political task in each generation.

—*Allen Callahan* - Faced with an outrage, anger is the price we pay for paying attention – it's not bad that we become angry.

—*Sara Wolcott* – The trick with anger is to let it inform us, maybe even to let it warm us if we've become too cold with indifference but not let the fire control or consume us.

Celebrated Buddhist teacher *Thich Nhat Hanh* elaborates on the “warming” idea – that we should “cook” our anger, like we cook potatoes. We put them in a pot, cover it and put the pot on the fire. We keep the fire going 20 minutes or so and the potatoes cook. Then we open the lid and smell the fine aroma.

Anger's like that—needing to be cooked. We don't eat raw potatoes. Raw anger isn't tasty either, but when we care for it – cook it – harsh energies of anger become positive energies of understanding and compassion.

The secret is generating mindful breathing or walking, embracing anger with tenderness. Anger isn't an enemy, it's like our lungs. Every time we have trouble in our lungs, we don't think of cutting them out. So too with anger. It can be transformed to serve positively.”

I've sat this week with John's take on this strong story, pondering how Jesus' action is good news today. And how good it is that scripture shows Jesus caring this much about things that are amiss – especially things that exploit or harm innocent, vulnerable people. Jesus doesn't just turn an indifferent or uninvolved eye.

This is good news for today where a lot is amiss. It's easy to feel paralyzed when it seems there's little to do to affect change. Feeling powerless can do what the first one-liner said – cause “*communal despair*.” This can happen globally, as well as in the small world of families.

Things amiss make us anger. Or may sink us into sadness. Anger and sadness *are* cousins. Feeling there's nothing to do but sit on our hands with the wrongs keeps some of us awake and puts others of us asleep, or distracted, or numb.

Stuffing things is wise sometimes, at least temporarily, long term stuffing has consequences. We may ask in all kinds of situations, “What would Jesus do?”

Today's text shows that Jesus isn't a one response fits all kind of model. Sometimes he turns the other cheek. Other times he doesn't.

Today's story is told a bit differently in each gospel – but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are clear, the Bible isn't conflict avoidant. Jesus engages real life. This year we read John's version of the story with its unique details.

Only John has Jesus using a whip he made himself out of cords. Cords are intertwined ropes of cloth – not metal or wood. Cords of cloth bring to mind more than wet noodles, but not the thrashing of iron.

We can think of cords as ties – as in the hymn “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in perfect love.” John's gospel has this sense. Jesus isn't out to kill the moneychangers. Jesus isn't against people. He's against practices that get in the way of love.

John's gospel centers on love. The text for Maundy Thursday in Holy Week is John 13 and the greatest commandment – love for one another. Today's overturning of tables is a love act. Sometimes love is tough. Some tables need turning and Jesus' is on it.

Following the way of Jesus isn't about the old adage “just be nice.” It's more about paying attention and being moved by what we see – even when seeing is awkward, inconvenient, or even costly. Once we “see” it's hard to not see.

Love is learning to see with the eyes of Jesus – which are cross-shaped; oriented toward the good of others and having ties with gladness. When things are really good there's gladness at the core – for the whole, not just the few.

Today's gospel is timely amid tax season. Taxes are good purposes. But wrongfully taxing people isn't good or glad. Wrongs need overturning – like any tables that harm.

We see tables as good things because we enjoy eating, but even good things can turn sour, can diminish rather than set free. It's good to hear in today's gospel that Jesus is willing to look "foolish" by the world – to get into good trouble so goodness and gladness might have free course.

The prayer Jesus taught includes, "*Thy will* be done on earth as in heaven." God's *will* often runs counter to the *will* of the world. Thank you for being a community hungry to learn of the goodness of God – even when it's treated as foolishness.

For instance, I look forward to a new rainbow flag hanging over our outdoor sign. Our neighbors took a video of someone climbing up and tearing it down. It may be torn down again, but we'll keep hanging it.

Scripture says, "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. God's weakness is stronger than human strength"

Be bold, little church! Be fools for Christ. Amen

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