

HOLY WEEK MEDITATIONS: MONDAY

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in me.

It Was On The Monday

It was on the Monday that religion got in the way.
An outsider would have thought that it was a pet shop's fire sale.
And the outsider, in some ways, wouldn't have been far wrong.

Only it wasn't household pets, it was pigeons that were being purchased.
And it wasn't a fire sale; it was a rip-off stall in a holy temple bartering birds for sacrifice.
And the price was something only the rich could afford.
No discounts to students, pensioners, disabled types or UB40 card holders.

The he, the holiest man on Earth, went through the bizarre bazaar like a bus in a china shop.
So the doves got liberated and the pigeon sellers got angry.
And the police went crazy and the poor people clapped like mad, because he was making a sign
that God was for everybody, not just for those who could afford him.
He turned the tables on Monday.....
The day that religion got in the way.

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Mark 11: 15 - 19

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Reflection

The temple in Jerusalem was laid out in such a way that there were various courtyards for different groups.

- Into the Holy of Holies only the High Priest could go.
- In the inner courtyard was the place for Jewish men while the Courtyard of the Women was beyond that.
- The Outer Courtyard was the only place that the Gentiles were permitted to go and worship God.

Imagine trying to worship God when all around you are stalls selling birds and animals, the money-changers all calling out for business.

Imagine the noise, the crowds, the smells.

Added to that, the stalls were managed by the High Priest so prices for the sacrificial animals were considerably higher than outside the Temple and the interest rates of the money changers were extortionate.

It's no wonder Jesus was angry.

No gentle Jesus meek and mild here - this was the wrath of God in action, sweeping away all that got in the way.

Everything that denied God and prevented people from worshipping him was swept away that day.

Pause now and think.

What gets in the way today?

Have we denied God by building barriers that stop others from meeting God?

What do we need to sweep away?

Prayer

Lord our God, forgive us for the many ways we create a market place instead of a worship place.

Forgive us the barriers we erect to stop others meeting you.

Jesus Christ forgive us, Holy Spirit renew us and transform us. Amen

HOLY WEEK MEDITATIONS: TUESDAY

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit in me.

It Was On The Tuesday

It was on the Tuesday that he gave it to them in the neck.

If you had been there you would have thought that a union official was being taken to task by a group of back bench Tory MPs.

Or that the chairman of a multinational corporation was being interrogated by left wing activists posing as shareholders.

They wanted to know why and they wanted to know how.

They were the respectable men, the influential men, the establishment.

The questions they asked ranged from silly schoolgirl speculations about whether you were a bigamist in heaven if you had married twice on Earth, to what was the central rule of civilised behaviour.

They knew the answers already....or so they thought, otherwise they would never have asked the questions.

And like most of us they were looking for an argument with no intention of a change of heart.

So he flailed them with his tongue... those who tried to look interested but never wanted to be committed.

And that was on the Tuesday... the day when he gave it to them....to us...in the neck.

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Mark 12: 18 – 27: Marriage at the Resurrection

¹⁸Then the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹“Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁰Now there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹The second one married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²²In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died too. ²³At the resurrection^[a] whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

²⁴Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶Now about the dead rising—have you not read in the Book of Moses, in the account of the burning bush, how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ ²⁷He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!”

Reflection

Why were they even asking? There are a couple of things to bear in mind about Sadducees who are questioning Jesus in this passage.

- They were selective in what Scripture they thought was more important than others. I wonder if we are all guilty of that in the way we often treat scripture today – we all have our favorite verses or passages that we find more comfortable or difficult to hear
- They did not believe in the resurrection, miracles, judgment, the afterlife, or angels. Their philosophy could be described as, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”

Why were they even asking? Did they want an answer?

During Jesus last days he has a number of challenging encounters with religious leaders, rulers, of course his disciples. The questions are increasingly designed to trip him up. And there’s motive – Jesus preaching and teaching was turning everything they taught and believed upside down, and what’s more he was gaining more and more followers. Could they trip him up today?

Today’s ridiculous question tries to cause Jesus to either deny the teaching of Moses or deny the resurrection. Of course, they had completely misunderstood ‘resurrection’; they had misunderstood the ‘kingdom’. We will always have the same problem if we try to understand the cross and the empty tomb through human understanding.

Belinda Carlisle famously sang “*Ooh, baby, do you know what that’s worth?, Ooh, heaven is a place on earth*”: like the Sadducees (and so many others) she only told half the message. When we come to know Jesus and accept the grace that he freely offers, we are forgiven for all our failures and our lives are transformed in the here and now, we are changed. But we are still being changed until we reach perfection and see our savior face to face. We find new ways to get through the challenges of this world but the reason is because we have seen a glimpse of a completely different reality, the Kingdom.

The best is yet to be.

We can use stories, illustrations, metaphors...but all fall short when describing the Kingdom. So it is no use asking worldly questions or applying human logic or understanding to what Jesus was about to achieve. “Let’s live like we’re dying...because we are. But let’s also live like we’re going to live forever...because we will...”¹

Prayer

Lord, prepare our hearts and minds to see beyond our human questions and doubts as we approach Easter.

Fix our eyes not on the things we cannot understand but on the wonder of your cross and the majesty of your resurrection.

Give us hearts that long for your Kingdom.

Grant us peace that we have been forgiven, changed and renewed but keep us yearning for what is to come. Amen.

¹ Rev Brian Bill