

John 2.13-22

I was once told a story - in the context of a social justice forum - now it is just a story. About a family who had been trying and trying to conceive. Finally after many years of worrying and prayer they have their little boy. A bouncing bundle of joy. Now one of the biggest milestones we all wait for is for the baby to speak. So the parents waited with eager anticipation for their little boy to get old enough to say their first word.

8 months happened - earliest opportunity, but nothing. That's OK - give him another few months. 12 months - nothing, 18 months nothing even though their little boy was hitting all the other milestones, he hadn't said his first words. By 2 years they were getting desperate, they sent him to specialists, bribed him with toys, food, fun adventures and outings. But still nothing. By the time he had hit 5 they thought it was never going to happen. Now on an average morning of an average day, the Mum decided to spice things up and she made porridge for the first time and placed it on the table for her family for breakfast. The little boy took his first mouthful and chewed, contemplated, swallowed and said 'Yuk'. Mum and Dad dropped their spoons in shock. What? Said the Mum. How can this be the first thing you said? The boys response 'Well, up until now, everything has been satisfactory'.

Now, my first response to this story which is just a story was....kids huh? But the question we were asked was 'When was the first time something left a bad taste in your mouth', when was the moment you were invited to partake of an injustice that left you with the feeling that you didn't like that, that you wanted to change something, that this was wrong. Some of the

biggest movements have come out of this sour after taste for example - the abolition of slavery, women's liberation, animal rights, environmentalism and this taste can exist in our everyday lives, unjust work environments, bullying, discrimination, domestic violence. Not because someone necessarily told us it was the wrong thing to do, but because our hearts and minds went 'hang on.....I can't be part of this, I have to say something out loud'.

Christianity was one of these movements that came out of the need to say something against unjust structures. The laws and codes served their function, they kept order amongst tribes and populations thousands and thousands of years ago. An agreed way for large groups of people to live together, but then that sort of changed, it turned into the 'only way' and the 'only way to those who had the money to do it'. The religious leaders of the times and society subscribed to a sacrificial system to have a relationship with God and to decide who was chosen and who was on the outside. People buying their animals to sacrifice to make amends with God through a conduit. Using these systems to tell them what put them inside of God's favour or what put them outside. To make matters worse, in our Gospel today, we see that this was also commercialised. It was a money making scheme. When people would travel to the Jerusalem from all over the country, it was too much for them to travel with their appropriate sacrifices so the Temple authorities made it simpler, they would sell you the sacrifice - your sheep, goats and birds - but only if you had the right coin for them to accept. No foreign currencies allowed, but that is OK, they will also make the easier, a good exchange rate for your foreign coins to ensure the purchase of your sacrifice. All of this available for the cleansing of your

sins, to those who could afford it. This is the scene that Jesus goes into and what we see is far from the Jesus meek and mild. This scene which occurs throughout the 4 gospels has Jesus in no uncertain terms saying 'Yuk' No, we are going to stop doing this. This is not the economy of God or how we should be having a relationship with God. He turns over the tables and makes a whip of cords and we call this scene the cleansing of the Temple.

Things had to change, for Jesus it was that the great love of God was bigger than this. It is wrong of us to make God's love small and specific.

Sacrificial system and codes in lieu of a relationship with God.

We still do it today - we use actions that we do in lieu of following the full call of Jesus on our lives. Well, I don't steal, I try not to lie, I haven't murdered anyone.....so therefore, I'm good - or we give a token effort to make up for a hurt. Jesus is asking for more than that from us, he is asking for our hearts, minds, souls and lives. That we dedicate ourselves to following his call.

Gil Bailie: "This is when the Gospels are so much more serious than we realise. Jesus didn't come to say 'the Temple is finished. Thank you and Goodbye'. He said 'the Temple is finished, and I will take its place'. And we have to ask ourselves, how can it be so? It is an outrageous claim. Jesus says 'You have used the sacrificial system up to this moment to stay sane and civil. I'm now going to take it away from you. You're now going to have

trouble staying sane and civil. I'm now going to give you another way, that's to fall in love with me, to follow me."

This is the love that we have inherited and the love that is offered to us, that we see most starkly in a moment where Jesus says no to what is happening in the world at the time. No to narrowing God's love to a prescribed formula. No to choosing who is in and who is out of that love. It is for all of us and it is up to us to make sure that the word gets out there. To all people. That all are welcome regardless of gender, wealth, ethnic background or any box that you want to label people. God is for everyone and justly so.