

### **LENT 3B 07-03-2021 The Reverend Lorna Green**

Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; I Corinthians 1:18-25; *John 2:13-22*

*The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money-changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.' The Jews then said to him, 'What sign can you show us for doing this?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.*

The older I get, the angrier I feel; I am becoming an angry old woman, and I'm tired of being 'nice'. I have felt so angry about the events of the past week that I needed to completely rewrite my sermon for today. Some may say that Christians should not express anger, that we should be patient and kind, forgiving and gentle, always giving the benefit of the doubt- and there is some truth in that. However, it is wrong to believe that Christians should not be angry or should suppress or hide or be ashamed of their anger- that does damage to our souls.

Today's gospel makes uncomfortable reading for those who think in terms of 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild'. Jesus is depicted here as angry, shouting at the stall holders and forcing them to leave the Temple and take their animals with them. Why was he so angry?

The Temple stall holders were allowed to be there; what they were doing was legal. But it was not honouring God, and that's why Jesus was angry.

There are many activities today that are legal but not ethical. Tax avoidance is legal if you have enough money. Those with money and power seem able to do and say outrageous things with impunity and no consequences to them.

The recent events concerning sexual assault allegations against a parliamentary staff member and then a cabinet minister, whose identity is now known, caused me to consider my own anger and the anger being expressed by many women and men around the country.

Here is a disclaimer: this is not about any particular political party, or even my own political views. This is about justice and the 'rule of law'- to which the supporters of the alleged offender keep referring.

Jesus challenged the 'rule of law' whenever it caused harm. He was not afraid to stand up to anyone, however powerful they were. He swam against the tide; he broke the rules when he knew the rules caused harm instead of help.

Speaking of rules, everyone knows the Ten Commandments- don't they? Many people will say that obedience to those ten laws is all you need to be a good person. I think I'd prefer to say- it's a good start. There's more to living as a disciple of Christ than following some rules.

Jesus set high standards for his followers. Remember when he said, "You have heard it said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Jesus demands we go further than the letter of the law.

With authority comes responsibility, and with power comes accountability. We expect those who make and uphold the law to be people of integrity and honesty, just as we demand high standards of behaviour of anyone whose work affects the lives of others.

The Anglican Church of Australia, and churches generally, have a disgraceful record of responding to complaints of sexual abuse and sexual assault.

Churches in Australia have now established a professional standards regime to enforce standards and assess fitness for ministry.

If the Professional Standards Unit received a written complaint about a church worker alleging rape, and if that came after other people had raised concerns about inappropriate sexual conduct, here's what would happen.

The church worker would be immediately suspended from duty, on the grounds that they pose an unacceptable risk of harm.

A committee would assess the complaint and determine whether there were, on the face of it, grounds for a hearing. An investigator would compile information and actively seek out additional information.

The matter would almost certainly proceed to a Board hearing, presided over by a senior legal practitioner, and several other eminent people. The Board would assess the church worker's fitness for ministry, and they would make findings 'on the balance of probabilities'.

This is different to 'beyond reasonable doubt' in a criminal trial - they would have to determine whether it is more likely than not that certain actions occurred.

They would be able to assess the whole range of the person's conduct, not just one incident or event.

It would then be open to them to put conditions on them for ongoing work, expel the person from ministry by a range of mechanisms, or prohibit them from doing church work in the future. This has now happened many, many times. It's tragic that there are so many, but good that the action has been taken.

Why then do cabinet ministers not have to submit to a process like that? Because priests and doctors and teachers and nurses and childcare workers and police officers and lawyers and foster carers and prison officers and such like DO.

There is currently NO parliamentary code of conduct.

Let's not forget that Grace Tame, Australian of the Year, fought for a long time to change the law that silenced victims of sexual abuse. Let's not forget that tomorrow is International Women's Day, while many Australian women still suffer in silence because the consequences of speaking out about what happened to them are likely to be more suffering and no justice.

What are we to do with all this? What is an appropriate, even a Christ-like, response to these situations?

First, we pray. God is accustomed to people pouring out their anger, grief, and despair in their prayers- just read the Psalms, or the Book of Job.

We pray for people who have been abused by those who had power over them; for people whose lives have been damaged, even destroyed, who either could not speak up or were not heard or believed when they did.

We pray for our government and all those in positions of power and authority, that they will turn to God to ask for wisdom and compassion, and in repentance when necessary.

And we give careful consideration to the kinds of people we authorise to govern us, the standards we hold them to, and the accountability we expect.

If the content of this sermon has caused you distress please know that I will listen to you, and help is available as needed.

The Lord be with you.