

3 Lent 2021

Loving Creator;

You know our comings and goings. You know when we succeed and when we fail. You know the deepest longings of our hearts. Through it all, your love surrounds us, embraces us, sustains us. In the stillness of this moment, let us abide with Christ in your love. Amen.

Our Gospel reading this morning was said to take place in the Court of the Gentiles. This court got its name from the fact that Gentiles were permitted into this area **provided** they conducted themselves in a **reverent** manner. Gentiles were forbidden from entering the inner temple areas and would suffer death if they did. Jesus entered the Outer Court in dramatic fashion. The most common reason given for what He did was because so many people were cheated by the merchants who charged high prices for animals to be purchased for sacrifice. But the purpose of the court demanded reverence. Thousands of people coming to Jerusalem made this difficult at best but adding in all the animals, merchants, and money changers made any atmosphere of reverence impossible.

Another interpretation given was that money stored at the temple could be loaned out to the poor to pay back debts owed to the aristocracy. The Temple establishment therefore co-operated with the rich in the exploitation of the poor. Certainly, all good reasons for His anger.

Many of the fresco and oil paintings that depict this scene, show Jesus raising the whip against the merchants. John describes the events this way: "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 moneychangers and overturned their tables. 16He told those who were

selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a market-place!'

Obviously, none of us were there, but I can imagine Jesus raising his whip and yelling to drive out all the animals. I can see Him overturning tables, pouring out coins, and chasing out the merchants. I have a much greater difficulty seeing Jesus, **whipping people**, especially in the light of His suffering which would soon follow.

There were those in the early church who did make a connection between Jesus whipping the merchants in anger and justifying current events in their time. According to Wikipedia, "Bernard of Clairvaux, who preached the crusade, claiming that fighting the "pagans" with the same zeal that Jesus displayed against the merchants, was a way of salvation. During the Protestant Reformation, John Calvin, in the line of St. Augustine and Gregory the Great, defended himself by using (among other things) the purification of the temple, when he was accused of having helped to burn Michael Servetus alive, a theologian who denied the divinity of Jesus".

I would not go so far as to say that any Christians, today, use the cleansing of the temple to justify acts of injustice and violence. But many acts of violence and injustice, **have been done**, in the name of Christianity.

Over the past 400 years, there is a plethora of examples of Europeans utilizing religion to facilitate conquest and subjugation of the North American continent. Native Americans were seen as heathens and treated as such.

The Seven Years' War was fought between 1756 and 1763.

The British general, Jeffrey Amherst, was a pretty despicable person. He despised the Mohicans as "a worthless tribe" and saw Native Americans generally as quote"the vilest

race of beings that ever infested the earth, and whose riddance from it must be esteemed a meritorious act, for the good of mankind." (End quote). He practiced what he preached. Amherst was the one who sent out smallpox-infected blankets among the native population on the western frontier.

The American defeat of the British, did not make things any better for America's Native population. In 1782, nearly 200 frontiersmen rode into Gnadenhutten, Ohio, a settlement of Mohicans who had been converted to Christianity by the peace-loving Moravians. The Americans murdered more than 90 Mohicans, a third of them children, before burning their cabins and stealing their possessions. Every school child has heard of the Battle of the Little Big Horn and Custer's Last Stand. How many have heard of the Gnadenhutten massacre? Colonization of Native American lands took place, in many instances, through the guise of Christianity.

The Bible was used often as justification for slavery. How many Black Americans were enslaved, whipped, beaten, and killed by those who professed to be good Christians?

Even now, children are sold into slavery to be abused in sex-trafficking. Women and yes, some men, are abused and beaten in domestic abuse situations every day. The abusers may identify as Christian, but even more worrisome, is the fact that so many Christians stand by and say nothing.

What are some of the issues that we, as Christians, should be angry enough about to **do** something?

Not too long ago, United Methodist Bishop Richard Wilke (of the Arkansas Area) identified three distinct problems that beset the postmodern church. Where these problems are confronted and dealt with, churches thrive. When congregations ignore

these problems, they undermine the vitality of the church and doom it to a kind of marginalized existence: He said;

“1. We live in a biblically illiterate society. Take an informal poll and see how many people you can find that can name five of the Ten Commandments correctly, or four of the eight Beatitudes. Too many congregants have only the haziest, mixed-up understanding of what is actually contained in the Bible. Bishop Wilke demonstrated this problem by telling of a man who was asked what he thought of Lot's wife. The man answered, "She was a pillar of salt by day and a ball of fire at night!" Growing, vital churches don't just snicker at this ignorance; they address it with Bible studies for adults and children that don't take for granted some working knowledge of the text.

2. We live in a society where the gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is growing wider and darker every day. Instead of clinging to memberships composed only of those with safe, secure status, successful postmodern churches must open themselves up to the lonely, forgotten, marginalized people crowding our sidewalks and parks, our hospitals and nursing homes.

3. Despite our addiction to youthfulness, we live in a society that is blatantly hostile to children. "Childhood" as a time when youngsters are specially protected and carefully nurtured is fast becoming extinct. The postmodern church that recognizes this and takes seriously its responsibility to its children, their spiritual and mental education, their moral and physical well-being, is the congregation that will thrive and grow, even as its youth does”.

I believe that there are other issues that should get us mad enough to do something. And I am not talking about the Lions never getting into the Super Bowl. I am talking about

issues such as the Prison System in this country, Law enforcement reform and Immigration?

We have all heard a lot about certain aspects of Law Enforcement over the past few years. I have mentioned before that several years ago, I was a Police Chaplain. My emphasis was always to be available to the officers. I understood the pressure they were under every single day that they went to work and the dangers they faced. So many, over time, have evidence of PTSD especially those who were prior military. So, I respect the officer and the job. There are too many, however, that for whatever reason, inflict abuse, injury, and even death to the public. In 2020, there were 1,004 fatal police shootings, and in 2019 there were 999 fatal shootings. Additionally, the rate of fatal police shootings among Black Americans was much higher than that for any other ethnicity. (Published by Statista Research Department, Mar 1, 2021)

One of the many problems with the prison system involves obvious racial and gender disparities. For example, while black inmates make up nearly 40% of the prison population, they only make up 13.40% of the total US population.

Michael T. Nietzel a Senior Contributor to Forbes magazine, wrote this ,last week, concerning Immigration; “Through its work with the Evangelical Immigration Table, the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an organization comprised of about 180 institutions worldwide, with approximately 140 in the U.S. Representing 37 different Protestant denominations, supports bipartisan, comprehensive immigration reform. It’s also advocated for Dreamers and DACA recipients and supports a permanent solution for these young people and their communities. It praised last year’s Supreme Court ruling that allowed DACA to continue. Here is its recent statement supporting the Dream Act:

'We believe a bipartisan, permanent legislative solution for Dreamers from Congress is the best means to provide a long-term solution for these young people and their communities.

Many of these young people in our country who were brought to the United States as children are now students on college and university campuses, and we feel the urgency of this issue for our students, along with their families, employers, churches, and communities. We also feel a moral imperative to support stability over insecurity for these vulnerable young people'. No matter what your opinions may be on Immigrants entering the country illegally, how they are treated once they are here should cause outrage.

There are of course other Hot Button issues for Christians. Inequality of pay for gender and race; Global warming, unfair and unequal treatment of people of color, the LGBTQ community, as well as those living in poverty, and suffering food insecurity. Let us not forget political corruption and human rights violations.

Any one of these issues should get us as Christians, "whip-cracking" angry. I am not just talking about sitting in a focus or discussion group talking about them, although that could be a start. Just as Jesus did, we must then go on to DO something about them. I am not talking about violence but it does require action. Where do we start? It is not too difficult to go online and find groups in your local community that are addressing an issue that you care about. You might start by doing some research and then setting up an appointment to sit down with the mayor, a city council member, or a county commissioner. You could write a letter to your congressperson or Senator. You could join your local NAACP chapter, attend meetings of the local Human Rights Commission, City Council meetings, any one of several Immigrant Rights Groups, volunteer at your

local Food pantries, serve meals at the Salvation Army; Volunteer with the Red Cross, serve at a Women's shelter; visit, or write letters to those in prison (once we are allowed in of course). We are not being asked to fashion a whip and hit the streets. But we are being asked to go out and do something, **anything**, to address injustice to our sisters and brothers, to those living on the margins.

Martin Luther King Jr said, "There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right."

This is all about love my brothers and sisters. The love of Christ given to those in the world through each of us. **It is time to do what is right.**

Amen!