

SHEPPARTON UNITING CHURCH AND SHEPPARTON RURAL CONGREGATIONS

HOLY MONDAY REFLECTION (April 6th, 2020)

Please pray with me a prayer written by Dan Benedict.

God whose word cannot be broken: with Jerusalem we are stunned this Holy Week. Like a city overcome with sudden devastation, we are swept up in the confusion and desolation, wondering what is happening.

Liturgy, Scripture, and song immerse us in the river that flows to betrayal and the cross. The gospel we have tried to make manageable has turned our tables of control. The sufferings of Jesus that we try to avoid engulf us.

The fruitless fig tree withers before the majesty of one whose mission is relentless and uncompromised.

Help us with all of your church to watch and pray, to behold anew the unfolding scandal and the ragged good news of salvation.

Behold with mercy the agonies of the world where the suffering of Jesus is being completed, both then and now.

Let the *Via Dolorosa* for us be both acts of devotion and worship and of compassion and justice, so that Christ's abundant sufferings become the world's abundant consolations.

Amen.

Reflection:

Monday of Holy Week was a busy day for our Lord as recorded in the Gospels. From the cleansing of the Temple recorded in all four Gospels (Mathew 21: 12-17, Mark 11: 15-19, Luke 19: 45-48 and John 2: 13-15), the cursing of the fig tree which appears only in Mathew 21: 18-21 and Mark 11: 12-25 to the anointing, recorded in all four Gospels (Mathew 26: 6-13, Mark 14: 3-9, Luke 7: 36-50 and John 12: 1-8).

In all accounts of these significant events in the life of Jesus, we find a somewhat different Jesus from the humble, non-violent and forgiving Jesus we are familiar with in the bible or that we want to Jesus to be known by. It seems so out of character which prompts some to believe that the cleansing of the temple had to be done and would not give in to an image of a violent, non-forgiving and uncompassionate Jesus. For example, Ray Foucher argues that Jesus simply fulfils a prophecy in Daniel 8: 14. Pope Francis sees the cleansing of the Temple not as a violent act but more of a prophetic demonstration.

The Gospel writers also differs in recording the anointing, with Mathew and Mark tells of an unknown woman who did the anointing and it happened in the house of Simon the leper (Mathew 26: 6-13 and Mark 14: 3-9). For Luke, it is an unknown sinful woman from the

northern region of Nain and Capernaum and it happened in the house of a Pharisee (Luke 7: 36-50), whereas in John's Gospel, it was in Bethany at the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus and it was Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus who anointed Jesus (John 12: 1-8).

The cursing of the fig tree, is it fair? Why would Jesus curse a fig tree that bears no fruit when it was not the season of the figs to bear fruits?

A little research about figs reveals that after the figs are pruned, the new shoots are leafy, budding with new life and tends to hide the fruits that figs continue to bear out of the old branches, which are often bigger and sweeter. Perhaps that was what Jesus expected, those bigger, sweeter fruits of the old branches. Here we can theologise a bit. By putting on our theological lenses we can see there is a coherence of meaning between the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree.

Like the fig tree, the religious institution is expected to bear fruit, bigger and sweeter and not to hide their fruitlessness with leafy commercialisation that exploits the poor and alienates the stranger.

The anointing gives us another clue. Anointing was reserved for prophets but in the stories in the Gospels, on this Holy Monday, it was performed by an unnamed sinful woman from a Samaritan territory and in the case according to John, in an ordinary house of two women with a brother that had been raised from the dead.

Questions for reflections:

1. Has commercialisation of religious institutions become just another tool for exploiting the poor, hidden by the leafy temptation of church growth and control? If so, give examples.
2. What is it that we need to be cleansed from as the temple of God, in both our communal and individual lives?

Concluding prayer: by Brian D. McLaren

God of healing and well-being, as I wash my hands, I ask you to cleanse me of other invisible viruses of the soul: Fear, hate, pride, greed, lust, hostility, supremacy, superiority, selfish interest, and all constriction of the heart. As I join billions of others in this practice, help me feel how deeply we are all connected and equally, infinitely loved by you. Amen!