

**Call to Worship**

As we begin our worship these words are for thinking today: 'The heavens are telling of the glory of God; we come together to proclaim it. In the wilderness, in the desert we cry out; our voice goes out through all the earth. We have been redeemed, we have been liberated, we have been brought into a new life; for we are God's own beloved.'

**Hymn – Dear Lord and Father of mankind**

**Prayer of Adoration & Praise**

We clear our heads, we still our hearts and we come before God in prayer, let us pray.

Loving God, you have brought us from darkness to light, through the love of your Son, Jesus Christ. We gather in hope and adoration, be with us as we strive to live by your instruction.

In an age of individualism, fear, greed and anger, we seek to live in peace with our neighbour locally and globally, give us the boldness to love you and all your people more freely and more generously.

In the promise of freely given grace and forgiveness let us, in silence, bring our own prayers to God:

Silence

May the silence be broken, may we be forgiven and renewed, and may we grow in love, today and every day.

For all this we ask in Jesus' name, who taught us when we pray together to say; Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive others that sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.

**Readings: Exodus 20: 1 – 17**

**20** God spoke, and these were his words: <sup>2</sup>“I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

<sup>3</sup>“Worship no god but me.

<sup>4</sup>“Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. <sup>6</sup> But I show my love to thousands of generations<sup>[a]</sup> of those who love me and obey my laws.

<sup>7</sup>“Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the Lord your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.

<sup>8</sup>“Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> You have six days in which to do your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work—neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. <sup>11</sup> In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the seas, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

<sup>12</sup> “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

<sup>13</sup> “Do not commit murder.

<sup>14</sup> “Do not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup> “Do not steal.

<sup>16</sup> “Do not accuse anyone falsely.

<sup>17</sup> “Do not desire another man's house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns.”

### **John 2: 13 – 22**

<sup>13</sup> It was almost time for the Passover Festival, so Jesus went to Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> There in the Temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and pigeons, and also the moneychangers sitting at their tables. <sup>15</sup> So he made a whip from cords and drove all the animals out of the Temple, both the sheep and the cattle; he overturned the tables of the moneychangers and scattered their coins; <sup>16</sup> and he ordered those who sold the pigeons, “Take them out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!” <sup>17</sup> His disciples remembered that the scripture says, “My devotion to your house, O God, burns in me like a fire.”

<sup>18</sup> The Jewish authorities came back at him with a question, “What miracle can you perform to show us that you have the right to do this?”

<sup>19</sup> Jesus answered, “Tear down this Temple, and in three days I will build it again.”

<sup>20</sup> “Are you going to build it again in three days?” they asked him. “It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple!”

<sup>21</sup> But the temple Jesus was speaking about was his body. <sup>22</sup> So when he was raised from death, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and what Jesus had said.

### **Hymn – A new commandment, I give unto you**

#### **Sermon – ‘Business as Usual’**

The religious authorities really did not understand what Jesus meant. How could Jesus rebuild a magnificent building that took 46 years to originally build in just three days. Three days sounds like the equivalent of a Biblical world ‘DIY SOS’. Yet, the religious authorities had not realised that Jesus was talking about His own body.

Why? Well, they were far too busy ensuring that a ‘business as usual’ mindset was being maintained. For, you see, it was business as usual when Jesus arrived at the Temple that day. Animals were being traded. Coins were being changed and all the usual people were in their usual spot with their usual role.

Our Gospel reading is one of those stories where we need to set aside, the parts which do not belong, the words that are distracting, before we can really understand what is happening. We need to set aside what we have often been told or thought this story is about, so we can ‘hear’ it again.

In all honesty, I do not think this story is simply about Jesus' anger. Jesus got angry. I get angry. It is okay to get angry. There is more to this story than that. I also do not think it is about the animals and the moneychangers being in the Temple. Jesus surely knew that they would be there. He grew up as a faithful Jew going to the Temple, He did not just arrive for the first time that day and say, 'What's going on here? This is wrong!' The scene in front of Jesus has always been there. That is how the system worked. It was business as usual for animals and moneychangers to be there.

Could it be that Jesus went to the Temple that day for one purpose; to throw out and overturn 'business as usual'. There are also times when we need the 'tables' of our lives overturned, and the animals thrown out. All of us can, so easily fall into the trap of business as usual.

I wonder, have you ever pressed the 'auto-pilot' button and your life has become, somewhat, mechanical? You go through the motions. You show up but you are not 'really' there. That is business as usual. When asked 'how are you', have you ever just smiled that 'I am good and everything is fine' smile but behind that smile, there is emptiness, you felt hollow, and your heart was breaking? That is business as usual. Or, maybe, you wake up in the morning and you are as exhausted as you were when you went to bed the night before. That is business as usual. Have you ever felt like you were just not yourself? Nothing seemed right? Boredom overcame creativity. No enthusiasm, wonder, or imagination? It was just business as usual.

Sometimes, we look at life and the world and it all seems in vain. Especially during a global pandemic. We are busy but we are not really getting anywhere. There is no depth or meaning, only business as

usual. Business as usual can happen anywhere. In friendships, in marriages, in parenting, in work and, also, in church.

This long list I have just read, are not, however, the problem. They are the symptom in the same way that the animals and moneychangers in the Temple are not the problem. They are the symptoms of something deeper going on. The problem is not so much in the Temple as it is in the human heart.

That deeper issue is, I think, what gives rise to a 'business as usual' attitude. Sometimes it is about our fear. We are fearful about what is happening in our life or the uncertainty of the future and we want some sort of security and predictability, so we can continue doing the same old things. Business as usual is predictable and steady but it only creates the illusion of security.

Sometimes, business as usual, is a symptom of our grief and sorrow. Something or someone has been lost. We cannot get back the life we want, so we cling to business as usual because it is familiar, and we just want some stability.

On other occasions, we are so bust and worn out making a living, that life turns into one task after another. One appointment after another. A never-ending to do list, and it is business as usual. Maybe we have taken people, relationships and things for granted. Maybe we have lost our sense of gratitude, wonder, or mystery.

Now, I do not say any of this as a criticism or judgement of you, or me, or anyone else. I am just naming what often happens to us. What has 'business as usual' looked like in your life? In what ways is it business as usual for you today?

There are thousands of reasons and ways in which we 'fall' into business as usual. There is one thing, however, that I keep coming back to, and that is, forgetfulness. Business as usual is born of forgetfulness. We forget that we really are the temple of God's presence. We forget that all of creation is God's residence. We forget that in whatever direction we may turn, there is the face of God gazing at us. As soon, as we forget these things about ourselves, each other, or the world, life becomes business as usual.

I think this is what led to the scene in the Temple that we have read today. The people did not see themselves or one another as the true temple of God. All their focus was on the human-built temple, the animals and the coins. The people had forgotten that God was more interested in them, than their festivals. They had forgotten that God wanted them more than their offerings.

When we forget that we are the temple of God, life can easily become a series of transactions. Relationships and intimacy are lost. Priorities get rearranged. Making a living replaces living a life. Life becomes a marketplace, rather than a place for meeting the God who longs to have a covenant relationship of love with us and others. Then, it is business as usual.

That is what Jesus is overturning and driving out of the Temple. God becomes human so that our eyes can be reopened to the relationships that are there for each one of us when we focus on our God and those around us, as our number one priority. When that happens, usual business, is pushed aside. We become the temple where God can be found. Let me share with you some examples.

Remember the Samaritan woman at the well. She has had five husbands and now is living with a bloke she is not married to. Despite, what we have done to her, that is not a statement about her. It is another manifestation of business as usual. Did her first husband, die, divorce her, or did he run off? We do not know. What we do know is that it was improper and dangerous to be a woman without a husband. Therefore, business as usual meant she had to 'belong' to a man.

So, there was a second man, and a third, a fourth, a fifth and a sixth. Jesus meets this woman at the well and interrupts business as usual. It is not about the man or men in her life. It is about her. Jesus recognises her as the temple of God. The temple is neither on this Samaritan hillside nor in Jerusalem. She is now the well of living water.

Then there was the man that spent thirty-eight years lying on a mat. He was paralysed and always trying to get into that pool of water that would heal him but someone else always got there first. The same ground, the same mat, the same paralysed legs, the same failed effort. Thirty-eight years of business as usual. Then Jesus comes along and says, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' And the man did. He rose up to new life and business as usual had been interrupted.

Remember Lazarus? He had been dead for three days. Martha knows the smell of death is present. Jesus tells her it will no longer be business as usual. 'Take away the stone,' He says. Death will not have the final word. 'Lazarus come out.'

Finally, let us not forget the five thousand people who came to hear Jesus and were empty and hungry. Philip is not sure there is enough. There is no way to feed them all. Empty and hungry people are



business as usual. Yet, Jesus has other plans. Two fish and five loaves are more than enough. Everyone was satisfied and twelve baskets were filled with leftovers. It was not business as usual for the empty and hungry crowds.

Over and over again, Jesus is interrupting, disrupting, overturning, and throwing out business as usual. Business as usual is destructive of our lives and our relationships. It destroys our ability to see and participate and have a relationship with the God Who us within us and amongst us.

The word became flesh so that the Temple might become human. Jesus continues to overturn and throw out business as usual because the truth is there are still Samaritan women waiting at the well in our modern-day world. There are still lame people grounded by business as by business as usual. Empty and hungry people are still a reality in our world and there are spiritually 'dead' people waiting to be made alive.

Does any of this resonate with you today? Maybe, you are the women at the well. Maybe you know how it feels to be grounded and paralysed. Maybe you are empty and hungry. Maybe you need to be called to life. Maybe 'business as usual' needs to be interrupted in your life.

Regardless of who we are, what we have done or left undone, or how we see or judge our life, we are the temple of God, and there is One Who stands in the temple of our lives interrupting business as usual. So, I wonder, what does the temple of your life need today? What tables in your life need overturned? What animals need to be driven out?

I am not asking about what needs to happen so that you can become the temple, but so you can see that you already are the temple and claim what is already yours. Jesus does not make us into something we were not. Instead, He calls us back to who we have always been. Humans who find themselves in a covenant relationship with the Living God.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

### **Hymn – When the music fades**

#### **Prayer for Ourselves and Others**

We unite our hearts again in prayer, let us pray.

Loving God, we come before you in humility, seeking wisdom, bathed in your eternal gift of love.

We pray for our world, this past year has brought great pain to so many people in every part of the world, alongside disease, the problems of injustice, greed and inequality continue unabated, the issues that we face seem insurmountable, but we pray for the confidence to answer the call for us to not only be witnesses but to be activists for love and justice.

We pray for this country, as it continues to struggle to find its way through its health problems, as well as the many other political and social problems that continue to plague the lives of the poorest and most marginalised, help us to care more, give more, and love more, and we pray for our leaders, that they will work for the betterment of all peoples and do what is right, not what is politically convenient.

We pray for your church, worldwide and here in Scotland, as we continue to work for your kingdom help us to make decisions and to act for the good of your church, your mission, and all your people.

We pray for ourselves and our community, gathered here online or later in the week, as well as all those living in this parish, that they will know peace and security, that they will know the true and radical love of God and God's people, help us to live out this gift today and every day. Amen.

### **Hymn – All my hope on God is founded**

#### **Benediction**

With a framework of love to live by, let us go in peace to love our neighbour, love the stranger and love God. And as we go, may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Spirit rest upon you and all whom you love this day and forevermore. Amen.

### **Closing Song – The Celtic Blessing**