

As a twenty-one-year-old, I decided to put the constant question of “are you going to be a priest?” to rest. I went to the Diocesan selection conference, and to my surprise, horror and everything in between, I was affirmed in my calling.

Like Jonah, at the point, all I wanted to do was run. I had watched with dismay people at their worst attacking the Dean of Hobart; the vitriol directed at the Bishop; and the immense disrespect of some parishioners towards their clergy. Why would I want a life like that?

To be fair, the climate in the mid 80s in the life of the Tasmanian church was tough; and some of that we have unfortunately heard more about in the recent Royal Commission. It was a time when some lawyers saw the protection of property and assets as being more important than the people the Church was called to protect: the vulnerable, the needy, the orphan and widow.

We certainly failed on many scores in that area of work, but I know that the intent of setting up care and charity was actually at the heart of the gospel message that was part of the early Diocesan Church.

Protection of the poor and needy, the widow and vulnerable. It is an aged old message that was handed down by Moses, reemphasised by the prophets, and confronted in the person of Jesus. It is the vulnerable and poor that must be looked after and have open access to the charity and love of God. It was not to be denied to them, and nothing was to hinder this.

Time and again, we hear Jesus emphasise this. As part of the readings for the child I buried Friday, Jesus took a vulnerable child into the middle of the disciples, blessed the child, and reminded us that we must open ourselves up to be as vulnerable and dependent as a child if we are going to enter the kingdom of God.

Nothing is to hinder them, and no matter where they stray, or what their journey, God’s love was never undiminished.

At the Elms, the gospel reading set for the day was the story of the man with two sons. Too often we concentrate on the so-called prodigal; sometimes we dare to side with the elder son, but we overlook the loving act of God in welcoming home his son. “He was dead, now he is back.”

There is no doubt what he did was absolutely dreadful in terms of family and culture, but in the bigger story, it is the loving Father who accepts and loves the son back into the fold. All is forgiven, and great was the rejoicing. Vulnerable, repentant and hungry, the Father’s love knows no bound to those who need to return to the beginning and start again.

But what do we make of the self-righteous anger of Jesus as we read in today’s Gospel? How can anger at the temple traders, the release of the animals and destruction of the money lenders be considered a loving act?

What we see here is the *wrath* or if you must, *wraaath!* of God. It is a righteous anger based on restoring the corrupt to be the place of intention. The Temple was originally built to

house the Ark of the Covenant, a holy gift that contained the 10 commandments, manna from heaven, and represent the holy presence of God. In the Temple itself was the Holy of Holies: a place that represents the reality of God with us, the incarnate presence of God.

What did Jesus find? He found the Temple forecourt full of trade and greed. It was not being respected as the place where God had pitched the tent, but rather, a corrupt centre of commerce that was stopping the least and vulnerable from being in that divine and sacred space. The changing of money out of the Roman currency into the Temple coin was done on commission; lenders were charging interest on loans to those who could not afford to pay: the sin of usury. The vulnerable, those for whom the Temple stood as a sign of God's covenant and justice was anything but merciful.

Taking some cords, and overturning the tables, Jesus pronounced sentence of those who would turn this house of justice and prayer into a den of iniquity.

It was not, though, just the thieving nature of the market that annoyed Jesus. It was the principle of holiness and disrespect to the place built to symbolise the incarnation. "Destroy this Temple, and in three days, it will be re-established." Now we get to the heart of the wrath.

The Temple, as I said earlier, contained the Holy of Holies. This is today's word I would like to have a look at. In the commandments, we read, "Remember the seventh day, and keep it Holy. It is the day on which the Lord rested." In resting on the seventh, or Sabbath, what God ensured is that even the most vulnerable, including the animals, were allowed to have time to recover. "Keep it holy."

Again, we strike a word with an interesting nuance that is beyond the Latinised *sanctus*, sacred or sanctified.

When we talk of something being 'holy', we often view it in terms of being of God. The nuance of the Aramaic and Hebrew is a bit more than that. It is simply that which is set aside or reserved for God or God's activities. In itself, it is not of God, but for use in the praise, worship and service of God.

I had a bewildering conversation with one of my RC priest friends one day, and I learned of the dogma of *transferred reverence*. We were talking about the *amice*, or if you like, the cloth that goes around the top of the priest's neck to protect the vestments. He declared it as holy due to *transferred reverence*. It was to be used in worship, therefore, it in itself was holy.

I see now that, to a point, he was right, but whilst the amice is useful and at times necessary, I felt that giving it reverence missed the point somewhat. At the end of the day, it's an ecclesiastical sweat rag, but still, he was right that it was set aside.

The Temple was set aside for worship and closeness to God, and as such, the temple culture of money lenders and the like stopped the vulnerable from accessing what was rightly theirs: time with the incarnate God.

When Jesus declares himself to be the Temple, the incarnate presence of God: the whole complexion of *God with us* is forecast in a manner that can only end with the death of Jesus. He had taken on the Jewish authorities, and next was the Roman, and having shown his wrath, assured himself of the path of the cross.

And on the third day, he rose again from the dead.

By virtue of baptism, each one of us has been set aside, and marked, for the service and growth of God's kingdom. Each one of us is set aside for the purpose of God.

The late Catholic Archbishop of Hobart, on learning that I had been accepted as a candidate for Anglican orders, met me one night on the steps of St John Fisher College, at the University of Tasmania.

Sir Guilford Young DD, Archbishop of Hobart. When we learnt that I was accepted for Anglican orders, he greeted me on the steps of St John Fisher College.

*Ahh, the young man called to be a Divine. Dennis, whatever happens, stay holy.*

Stay holy. It's taken nearly 35 years to work this out.

I'm not a saint. I'm not an ecclesiastical item. I was set aside for ministry at baptism, confirmation, and ordination. I was set aside to be here in the Macedon Shire. As each one of you are also set aside to spend time with God.

One of the things that now seems clear to me was what was behind Sir Guilford's advice. His love of the nuanced words at the time of Jesus and Paul probably still inspires me, although, I can promise you, I'm not about to give 90 minutes sermons like he did. Gilly dug into the words and their context and opened up something exciting: the language behind the sacredness of God's love for us.

Each one of us are set aside for doing the will of God. And like the temple, we are not to do anything that hinders others from entering into our lives or joy as Christians in the Anglican tradition.

So, we set aside this time as a meeting time, gathering in this place, to remember, celebrate and prepare to share the good things God has instore for us. We also find solace, comfort and strength when our world view, through vulnerability, is challenged. We open our churches and our hearts, setting them aside, even if only for an hour, to be with our God.

God risked all and became human, establishing in himself, Jesus, the new way, a living way. If there is anything that is stopping that new way from being where it needs to be, then let us be the first to upturn the tables and return that which is holy back to being set aside for ALL of God's people.