

2022 ALL-AGE TALK FOR CAREY, 10.4.22, MATT 21:1-17

'METHINKS HE DOTH PROTEST TOO MUCH...'

So, I asked an awkward question earlier. Why does John, who wrote one of the stories of Jesus, put the incident of Jesus clearing the Temple at the beginning of his story, rather than at the end ? The three other stories of Jesus, put the clearing of the Temple as part of the events of Easter week. Just before Jesus was crucified - not just after he began his ministry. Any thoughts about that big difference ?

One possible reason is that John wanted to flag up that Jesus was a protester. He puts this event at the start of Jesus' ministry to show that his whole ministry is a campaign against the 'powers that be'; against the powerful, religious leaders of his day. John is saying that Jesus' clearing the Temple is not just a one-off event. It seems clear from *all* of the stories of Jesus, that he was always protesting against the way things were. The way things were expected to be. What people had been told to believe, as something that should not be challenged.

I first became a protester over 30 years ago. in the 1980s. I'm sure some of you have been protesters for much longer than this. I joined a march against the poll tax. And because this protest was in leafy, affluent Tunbridge Wells, it hit the headlines of a national paper. My face was a tiny blot of ink in a small crowd of angry people... I proudly showed the newspaper to my Nan. I didn't quite get the reaction I was expecting. 'What did you do that for?' she asked. I replied that I wanted to take stand against something that I didn't think was fair. To which came the blunt reply: 'Life's not fair'. Well, I couldn't argue with that. But such a saying belongs together with another saying of Jesus. During Easter week Jesus said: 'The poor you will always have with you'. In other words, the offence of poverty is a challenge that we all, always have to face & respond to.

It is not hard for us to find something to protest about. Social media is full of the latest campaign. People trying to get other people stirred up about a particular cause. It can seem both bewildering and wearisome.

But, from Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and his actions in the Temple, we should not dismiss this urge to raise our voices. Both in praise, but also, like Jesus, in protest. This urge to take a stand against the many injustices of our world is a God-given one. We should do this in the name of Jesus, no less. And we should

challenge those who seek to silence and prevent protest and dissent. Sadly, we are seeing this with our current government. Not only seeking to increasingly criminalise protesters, but also shutting down some other avenues of popular dissent. The planned privatisation of Channel 4 is such an example. The campaign against the BBC. A democratic government seeking to limit freedom of speech. A democratic government intent on pumping out misinformation. We are living in dangerous times...

The story of Chris Packham is worth thinking about. Chris Packham is the popular presenter of nature programmes like 'Springwatch'. For a long time he was hailed as a great champion of the great outdoors. But as soon as he started to protest against all the damage to God's creation, he was mocked by the right-wing press.

Something like the story of a Christian from El Salvador, Archbishop Romero. He said: 'When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask, "Why are the poor, poor? they call me a communist."' (And we know what happened to Romero don't we? They gunned him down while he was leading worship, just as he was remembering the crucified Jesus in bread and wine).

Many Christians argue that there are only certain 'spiritual issues' that Christians should protest about. Just matters to do with our 'religious freedom'. But this ignores the fact that the erosion of someone else's freedom is actually the erosion of all our freedom. And, who will stand up for and speak up for God's creation? I confess to being pleased when I see young people striking from school, in order to stand up for nature and campaign for positive change.

Let me finish with another story.

The bullies came to pick on those who were disabled. No-one else said a word or tried to stop them. Then the bullies came to get those who were overweight. No-one else shouted out to try to stop them. Then the bullies came for those who didn't wear the right trainers. No-one else tried to stop them. Then the bullies came to trample the flowers. No-one tried to stop them. Then the bullies came for you and your friends. But there was no-one else left to say a word or to stand up for you.

We are called to both declare God's praise and to protest against all injustice – in the name of Jesus.