

It strikes me on a fairly regular basis that teaching from the bible can be quite tricky. When I take assemblies at school I have to go cautiously so as not to give the wrong impression.

David slays Goliath by slinging a stone at him and chopping off his head. Now Children...why don't you act that out in the playground at lunchtime?

What about the story of Noah? The whole world drowns!

Or Elijah on mount Carmel – he puts 300 prophets of Baal to death.

The story of Joseph can keep us going for a few weeks and includes all manner of topics I have to word carefully. Go back and read it, remind yourself of the scene between Joseph and Potiphar's wife.

Are we on safer ground in the New Testament where we can look at the amazing life of Jesus who clearly is a role model?

I remember my Mother teaching me a bedtime prayer which began, gentle Jesus Meek and Mild. Well – not in today's scripture he's not.

I'm not the only preacher to feel a bit uneasy dealing with Jesus in the temple. In an essay on this passage Paul Shupe writes:

Surely all preachers feel queasy in the pit of the stomach when Jesus takes his whip and drives the money changers from the temple. Queasy because along with the surge of righteous adrenaline that is produced when Jesus shifts into prophetic mode, comes the sneaking fear that we might have something in common with the targets of his judgement!

I'll come back to that later.

In the synoptic Gospels we know that Jesus cleanses the temple as part of the drama leading to his arrest and crucifixion, it comes at the end.

But John's Gospel isn't chronological, he picks and chooses his stories for a different purpose. In the opening chapter of the Gospel, as Dolapo reminded us, there is a glorious hymn of praise to Jesus the light of the world and John says "we have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son.

In the passage before today's reading we have the wedding at Cana and Gilly shared with us her amusement at the poor servants having to fill the huge water jars. It's the first of the signs revealing who Jesus truly is and again, his glory is revealed and his disciples believe in him.

But before we go too far down the miracles, healing, preaching and teaching route, we have today's anger and aggression. What does this reveal of who Jesus really is? Why had John put it in?

The great John Calvin believed that the person and work of Jesus Christ are understood as a threefold perspective, he is Prophet and Priest and King. That idea is weaved into some of our hymns. Calvin's ideas are not held in quite the same esteem as they once were, but that doesn't mean he is wrong in this understanding.

Jesus priestly office is to intercede for us, to bring reconciliation and to offer himself as the final sacrifice needed.

Jesus kingship is undisputed – at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, he is Lord of all.

Jesus as prophet? Well like the prophets through the ages he speaks the word of God and acts the word of God. He speaks the truth because – as we learn in this gospel, Jesus is the way the truth and the life.

It's in his prophetic role that Jesus comes to the temple. A prophet is only known to be a true prophet if their words come true. John concludes this passagethe temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. One purpose for this story being placed here is to reinforce the disciples' belief in Jesus and his words.

So at Cana we have Jesus glory revealed, here we see anger, a righteous anger. Here we see Jesus standing with a whip in his hand.

The only place Gentiles could worship and encounter God was the outer court but it was a market place and a banking hall. Actually these things were needed. Pilgrims needed to purchase animals to sacrifice and change money from Caesar's coins to temple money. Jesus is objecting to where they are AND the corruption that seemed endemic. So here we are on Jesus side, the whip is for someone else.

Jesus speaks for us and with us. He is the one who makes a way for us to encounter the father. So still no problem with the whip.

What though if Jesus wishes to speak to us or speak against us? That's why we might feel queasy. If Jesus came to Sunningdale, would our actions, our habits, the things we are so used to we no longer see them, cause him to speak forcefully to us? Is that whip pointed in our direction?

Lent is a time for reflection and repentance and to allow the Word of God (capital W – the enfleshed Word, Jesus Christ) to draw near by invitation. Lent is the time to let Jesus speak his words (lower-case) of truth to us, the first step is to be willing to listen.

Only when we are convinced of the very great love God has for us, shown by Jesus going deliberately to the cross, will we find the courage to let him draw near and speak.

There may need to be some clearing out. There may need to be some overturning and it's rarely achieved without turmoil, but the result is that we as individuals and we as a church clear the space to encounter the living God.

So to conclude these thoughts I would like us to sing the Hymn "O breath of life come sweeping through us". The first three verses lead to the request to be re-made, revived and restored – a temple cleansed! Then in verse four the impetus for encounter, a harvest, a world waiting to discover the living Word, the life, Jesus the light of the world.