

The Rev. Kate Byrd  
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## Jesus in the Temple

When you think of Jesus what do you think of? A sweet baby wrapped in swaddling bands cuddled up amongst the hay in his meek and mild manger? A bearded man dawning sandals and a tattered robe, sitting in a field with children surrounding him on every side? A kind shepherd guiding the sheep of every flock into the safety of his fold? Maybe even a sacrificial lamb hanging on the cross, whose eyes you hate to meet, but whose gaze is still filled with compassion and love for you? My guess is, in all the images we have and hold of Jesus very few of them feature an irate young man flexing his muscles as he overturns tables, and lashes about with ropes and whips, throwing around coins and chasing out animals. No... that doesn't sound like Jesus meek and mild, who asks us to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. This sounds more like an overgrown toddler throwing a tantrum and leaving behind one heck of a mess in his wake. Nonetheless this is Jesus, who just last week asked us to pick up our cross, and the week before informed us that: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

I'll make a confession to you all today. I don't like the Jesus we find in the temple today. I mean this Jesus doesn't come to us with parables, asking us to use our imagination and sense of reason to find meaning in his words and actions. This Jesus isn't healing the sick to share God's power, or sharing a meal with the dejected to show the Divine's love, or even turning water into wine to reveal the Creator's generosity. No, this Jesus is yelling and screaming and making a fuss to get our attention and show us how we've missed the mark. And, it's appalling, it's disconcerting, it's downright uncomfortable because, I fear, it's true. And while I can't say with certainty why Jesus made this scene, driving the sheep and cattle out of the temple with whips, or pouring out the coins of the money changers as he overturned their tables. Or yelling at the dove handlers as he shouted "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace." I can say, it was in an effort to both make a scene and share a point.

Jesus wasn't mad, that they were making sacrifices in the temple, Jesus was a Jew that was a part of his religious practice. Jesus was, I would assume, saddened and frustrated because the tables and the money changers, even the animals represented all the ways we create barriers and division. Barriers for equal and equitable access, and division between those who are in and those who are out. The marketplace in and of itself was not the problem, but the way in which the market allowed only those able to pay for the sacrificial animal to participate, and disallowed others from even entering in the first place, that was (the problem that is).

And, this right here is precisely why I'm uncomfortable with today's Jesus. Because this is where I hear Jesus asking me to consider what tables, or money changers, or even sacrificial animals I am using in my mind, and my life, and even my church, in order to maintain my own sense and understanding of the status quo. Here Jesus asks me to consider how I am complacent in allowing division to continue and barriers to remain? Not because Jesus wishes to blame me, or make me feel bad, but because Jesus, the Son of Man and Son of God, desires so much for myself and us all to have the opportunity to fully participate in dwelling with the Divine, with one another, and with ourselves, without restraint or hindrance, without having first to make an exchange, or pay a price, or pass through a checkpoint.

This year our bishops, Sam and Jennifer, have asked us, your clergy, to read you a letter. One that addresses their hopes and dreams for us as a Diocese and as St. Paul's to join with them in what they have identified as the most important work we can do at this time. Work that will allow us to more fully live in God's desire for us to become, more and more, God's Beloved Community. And this is the work, in the words of our bishops, of racial reparations and restitution. Reparations, meaning to speak honestly about the ways we have missed the mark, in loving our neighbor as ourselves. And restitutions, meaning to

reclaim something that has been lost or stolen, this being our ability to fully live into that beloved community and kingdom of God. And so I read this letter to you all today, with the hope that you will join me in considering how the Jesus we find in our Gospel passage for today is asking us to make space and room in our minds, our lives, and this church for us to live into the good news which is this: “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” so that we might not only know the love of God but experience it as well, through our worship here in this church and through our lives as we continue to be the hands, feet, and heart of Jesus in the world!

Here’s the letter:

At Convention in November, we announced an invitation and expectation for the congregations of the Diocese of North Carolina to engage in the work of racial reparations and restitution, beginning with an intentional process of truth-telling and reckoning. This engagement is an essential expression of our commitment to Christ and to his call for justice and love, and thus to the mission, health, and well-being of each congregation. A committee of folks, from across our diocese and our governing bodies, has been studying and researching reparations and restitution for the past three years. We agree with the committee’s conclusion, that to fruitfully engage this work, each congregation must have structured conversations about race that include hard questions and answers about both the past and present. Each must then decide how to respond to what they learn. Only then can we make wise decisions that will help bring about a brighter, better future. To that end, Lindsey Ardrey and the Reparations and Restitution Committee have prepared a curriculum and accompanying resources to assist our congregations in this exploration and journey. Because our congregations are in different places and stages in this ongoing effort, and one size will not fit all, the curriculum features three different starting points. One is for congregations just beginning this work, another for churches who have done some historic research and want to take the next step, and a third for congregations who have done the historical work, have wrestled with options in response, and are ready to take action.

In this season of new beginnings, we invite your congregation to review the curriculum, to pray and discern, and then to commit and engage in this life-giving work. One of Jesus’ gospel promises to his followers is that we will know the truth, and the truth will set us free. Walk with us; pray with us; listen and learn with us how God is calling each congregation of our Diocese to respond to its particular history and our commitment to justice, to truth telling, to liberation and to life. May the promise of hope and joy that came to us, in human form, in Jesus, be our guide, our light, our truth.  
In God’s grace,

The Rt. Rev. Samuel S. Rodman, and The Rt. Rev. Jennifer Brooke-Davidson

With all this in mind, I will be working over the Spring and Summer to gather together a group to begin the work we as a Diocese are called to. And, Allison Elsee, who is on our Diocesan Racial Justice and Reconciliation Committee, and our Senior Warden, will be supporting us well. If you are interested in this work, please reach out to either her or myself. As we continue in our season of Lent, repenting and returning to God. I pray we might find time to listen to the Jesus we find in our passage today, not as a voice of condemnation, but as a voice of conviction. One which reminds us, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Because, this Jesus is about resurrection, this Jesus is about God dwelling with us, this Jesus is about good news which is salvation for us all!