

## REFLECTION 3<sup>RD</sup> MARCH 2024

### “Justified anger”

*By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai*

I'm sure everyone here in this church has experienced many a time in our lives when we have been angry and we believe justifiably so. From tantrums on the playground to sibling rivalry, parent child conflicts, marital conflicts, workplace conflicts, conflict among friends. There are always two sides that are angry at one another and often both sides feel justified in their anger, and when it feels as if it cannot be resolved people often just walk away. However, when one chooses to stay and confront it face on it can end up becoming violent and can explode. The alternative is that one walks away and then there is the possibility of ones unresolved anger imploding on oneself. When this happens (I'm not a psychologist) we often end up trying to distract ourselves away from the external anger by internalising it and finding ways then to self soothe and unfortunately some of these ways may be also be self-destructive and we end up imploding on ourselves. Addictions, drugs, alcohol, gambling etc. We implode to point of suicidal ideation even and sadly in some cases success.

Some of the symptoms of implosion may be that They may withdraw from social interactions, lose interest in activities they once enjoyed, or struggle to concentrate and make decisions. Physical symptoms, such as insomnia, headaches, or even somatic complaints, can also accompany the psychological implosion.

To implode or explode. Justified anger is anger that is primarily motivated by a perception of injustice or other profound moral lapse<sup>12</sup>. It is a way of

communicating that something is important and needs attention<sup>3</sup>. Justified anger can lead to increased cooperation if the response is appropriate and the misunderstanding is corrected<sup>3</sup>. However, justified anger can also turn into self-righteous anger, which is a form of anger that is not expressed or admitted until it explodes in a rage<sup>4</sup>. Basically, you feel justified in your anger when you know for sure why you're angry. For example, if something has happened to you, or someone has offended or hurt you, you are very likely to **feel justified** in your feelings of anger.

The only thing is, if you go overboard in how you express your anger, it won't feel justified any more. Here are some more points to consider: Ultimately, all anger is justified, meaning there is always a good reason in there somewhere, if you're feeling angry. If you don't know the reason, then your anger will not feel justified, and you may suppress it, to the detriment of your health. Also, if you express your anger in ways that are harmful to others, you will no longer feel justified...at least your actions will not feel justified. For example, you are justified in being angry if someone drives aggressively, endangering ñ life...but if you shoot them or ram them with your vehicle, then you've become a bigger problem than they were. The bottom line here is that the emotion of anger is always justified, meaning there are always good reasons for feeling angry. However, the action you take in anger is another matter entirely.

I wonder which category Jesus falls into in this gospel narrative which has Jesus losing his temper with the buyers and sellers turning his fathers sacred temple into a den of thieves. Imagine the setting, Jesus enters the temple on that It takes place in the outer court of the temple, a huge area, big enough to house a few football fields. It does not take place in the sanctuary, itself. At Passover time there would have been crowds of people. People needed to change their

money into the currency acceptable in the temple and needed to be able to buy birds or animals for sacrifices. Soldiers usually closely guarded the area. A major commotion would immediately attract attention and arrests. Assuming the story has historical roots, Jesus' action must have been swift and limited, sufficient not to lead to his immediate arrest. It must have been a symbolic action. But what did it mean?

The account in Mark draws on Isaiah and Jeremiah to portray what Jesus might have said. 'Den of thieves' has led people to believe that Jesus was objecting to unfair commercial practices, whereas it may well have intended something more like: den of bandits. Here in John the trading is objected to in itself. Yet everyone knew that the money exchange and the sale of sacrificial animals was essential. Is the problem the activity or the location? Did Jesus have such high respect for sacred space? It is likely that Jesus objected to what the temple had come to represent power and exploitation. The otherwise innocent structures of exchange and sale were part of a system, which he and many others of the day saw as corrupt and fit only for destruction.

According to the first three gospels this incident played a major role in the events leading up to Jesus' execution. In the fourth gospel it is portrayed as taking place three years earlier. Yet it is also seen as being a cause for Jesus' death.

The first thing worth noticing is that this episode – Jesus' encounter with the traders in the Temple, occurs in a different location from the other gospels. For Matthew, Mark and Luke this incident takes place near the start of Holy Week, just after the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, whereas for John it comes near the beginning of the Gospel, straight after the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee.

When it comes to the purpose of this passage, there is a little marker in verse 13 if we know to look for it. Throughout his gospel when John refers to the Passover ("the Passover of the Jews was near", v3), it is a signal that this passage is about the passion of Christ. As becomes evident later in the passage, from v19ff, John's primary concern here is about what (or who) the Temple is.

The Temple throughout the Hebrew scriptures is a place where people encounter God. John is highlighting that, in Jesus, the location of that encounter has shifted. It is no longer the physical Temple, which by the time that John was compiling his gospel already lay in ruins, but the person of Jesus. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (v19).

Another difference between John's account and that of the synoptic writers is less obvious but, nonetheless, significant. Whereas their focus is on how the Temple has been turned into a "den of robbers" (Mark 11:17), John's concern is more nuanced: "He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!'" (v16).

John is less concerned about the illegality, or otherwise, of what is happening in the Temple courtyards and more about how what has developed as regulation and law now obscures the Temple's foundational purpose – to be a place of encounter with God.

For John, it is not simply the sheep, cattle, doves and money changers who are being driven out, but the capacity to relate to God.

Jesus' anger and subsequent action of overturning tables and chasing the money changers and animals out of the temple could have been a culmination of

many things. It is highly likely that for him this was justifiable anger particularly when he takes what is happening as a personal offence and insult to the integrity of this place that he states is his father's house. No one else really knows or understands what the heck he is talking about. There is much about Jesus actions and thoughts that even though he tried to explain to his disciples and followers what was about to happen to him and the purpose of his ministry, it was sometimes too hard to comprehend. That is why Jesus introduced parables to simplify the message for these simple fishermen. But the penny didn't always drop for the listeners. Like Peter last week he missed the point completely and so Jesus said "get behind me Satan".

Teu le va or aua le toia le va... knowing your place, respecting your boundaries and staying within the gap. Everyone in society has a gap that you tread respectfully around. You do not impose your amateur opinions on someone who is professionally qualified in an area that you are not etc.

The Lenten journey and the passion narratives leading up to Easter, the crucifixion and resurrection is not necessarily an easy story to follow. Our dear Sir Lloyd Geering who turned 106 on Monday has had a life time of explaining his position on the resurrection and so many evangelicals have not been able to grasp his message. On the other hand he is upheld as a theological scholar and hero globally and especially in our church. The more you know about the bible the less you know, would you agree with me?

Many of us here have been through the biblical and theological doldrums where what we once believed and was taught throughout our Christian faith journey no longer has any teeth. There has been too much literalism and taking the bible out of context.

So what does the Easter story therefore mean for us today? How can it speak to us afresh that we will be able to find in it a time for refreshment, renewal and a lifegiving opportunity. That the burden of the crosses we carry around on our own can be shared and lifted in the company of this community who offers a shalom and lifegiving love and peace as the face of Jesus in the here and now. Amen.