

John's Gospel

- St John's Gospel as we now have it appears to have been written around the year 100.
- It is not the work of one person called John.
- It is probably the result of the 'writing down' of Johannine traditions coming from various Johannine 'schools of disciples, or house churches.
- There is no doubt that one person did, however, put these writings into the form we now have them.
- The 'writing down' seems to have been provoked by the expulsion of Christians from the synagogues around 90AD and the move of the Johannine community from Palestine to Ephesus(?) and other places in the Diaspora.
- John's Gospel is characterised by a long argument about the identity of Jesus as one who is from above.
- Jesus is in opposition to and opposed by, the Jews.
- This reflects the historical context of the Johannine community, often persecuted and ultimately expelled from Jewish life (Temple, synagogues and communities).
- The Johannine Jews accepted Jesus as Son of God and Messiah. The rest of the Jewish communities did not.
- The 'Jews' in John's Gospel broadly represent the 'non-believers' – not the members of a race or religion.
- The other Gospels refer to Jesus' miracles, but John calls them signs.

John 2: 13-25 - The Cleansing of the Temple - NOT

- This passage, often referred to as the Cleansing of the Temple, is from St John's Gospel.
- John's Gospel places Jesus' action in the Temple immediately after the Wedding Feast of Cana and immediately before the story of Nicodemus (birth from above, born of the spirit, conversion, rebirth and eternal life).
- The other Gospels place this scene much later in the ministry of Jesus and present it as the immediate cause of this arrest and death (for predicting the destruction of the Temple).
- The Temple in Jerusalem is THE place of worship for Jews.
- The Temple is a meeting point between God and his people.
- Jesus is at the Temple at THE most sacred time in the Jewish calendar - Passover
- 'Just before the Jewish Passover Jesus went up to Jerusalem...' – There was an expectation that all Jewish males would go to Jerusalem for the Passover Feast. Pilgrims came from all over the Empire and needed a lamb to sacrifice. Stalls were set up in the outer courts of the Temple to enable people to buy the lambs and to pay their Temple tax. This they could not pay using the coin of the Empire which bore the image of Caesar which proclaimed him as 'divine'). So the money had to be changed into *Temple coin* to pay the tax.
- It is in these outer courts that Jesus' action takes place – NOT in the Temple itself.
- Jesus' actions of turning over tables, scattering animals, etc, would have been deeply shocking to the onlookers. It is a sacrilegious desecration of the sacred place.
- '...stop turning *my Father's house* into a market.' In Jewish thinking the Temple was 'The Lord's house' – here Jesus renames it as, 'my Father's house.' John has already signalled that Jesus is the dwelling-place of God in 1:14 – The word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us.
- 'the disciples remembered the words of scripture...' – the word 'remembered' has a particular meaning in John's Gospel. It means that the disciples see that what has been spoken of before has *come to fulfilment* in Jesus. They are not simply remembering some words from Scripture or from Jesus – they are *realising* that what has been said and done before *has been fulfilled* in the words and actions of Jesus.
- 'What sign can you show us to justify what you have done?' John presents the actions of Jesus as the actions of a prophet. Note that the challenge that 'the Jews' present to Jesus is rather mild. He is not arrested or attacked. They simply ask for a sign to prove that his actions are

indeed prophetic – that is, they are asking about the deeper meaning of Jesus’ action. Mary Coloe says that the deeper meaning of Jesus’ prophetic action is that the ‘Temple system is now over. This is no longer the way to be in relationship with God.’ The (new) way to be in relationship with God is through Jesus, the living Temple.

- That helps explain Jesus’ reply about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in 3 days. As the text explains, Jesus is not talking about the earthly Temple, but about himself as the Temple of God.
- Again, the disciples *remember* this when Jesus rose from the dead. And in remembering come to believe.
- While the Jews reject the answer Jesus gives, the disciples, even without fully understanding, continue to follow him.
- John presents this scene as a ‘sign of resurrection’. The Jews ask for a sign from Jesus but reject it when it is given – just as later Jewish communities will reject the Johannine communities and belief in Jesus.
- Signs in John’s Gospel are not about proof of authority to act nor a way of engendering faith among followers - rather, they point to a reality beyond the physical action; they say something about who Jesus is, who God is, how God acts towards his people, how the disciple acts towards God & neighbour.
- ‘During his stay in Jerusalem for the Passover many believed when they saw the signs he gave ... he knew them and did not trust himself to them ... – These verses appear to be a warning about faith based on miracles (signs).
- ‘He could tell what a man had inside him.’ – knowing the ‘heart’ of a person is an attribute of God in the Scriptures. John applies it to Jesus and demonstrates it with Jesus’ renaming Simon to Peter and in the episode where he names Nathaniel, ‘incapable of deceit’.
- These verses also form a bridge to the ‘true faith’ story of Nicodemus which follows.

The Lenten Context – why does the church choose this passage to reflection for this Sunday of Lent?

- This Sunday Jesus is the new temple – the living presence of God. God is not found in stones but in the person of Jesus, the living Temple. The way to be in right relationship with God is through Jesus, the living Temple.
- Next Sunday (from the story of Nicodemus) is about being born from above. Jesus comes to heal and to save. Those who come to Jesus (believe) also have the living presence of God and the gift of eternal life. That is what being born from above, being born of the spirit is about.
- This Sunday’s Gospel is also a reminder that Jesus’ journey did not end in death, but in life.
- The Lenten journey is not a journey of death (self-focused on my failings) but a journey into light and life (by conversion and deeper belief).
- It is also a salutary warning against thinking that ritual religion and true belief in Jesus are the same thing.

Reflection

The Gospels of the last two Sundays showed us that the Christian journey is from Temptation to Transfiguration. The Gospels of the next three Sundays of Lent present Jesus as *the road* (or *The Way*, as the early Christians referred to him) from temptation to transfiguration.

In the Old Testament scriptures the idea of the people of Israel being ‘the people of God’ is clearly established. By their behaviour they were to be a ‘light to the nations’, and the dwelling-place of God’s presence. Only much later did the idea of God dwelling in a building called a temple develop. Even so, the Jews never lost the sense that they were to be God’s own people.

The first reading from Exodus (commonly known as the Ten Commandments) gives a pattern for God’s people to live in right relationship with God and neighbour; to be the dwelling-place of God’s presence.

In today's Gospel we find a deeply passionate Jesus causing a near-riot in the outer precincts of the Temple. In John's Gospel Jesus' prophetic actions have less to do with 'cleansing the Temple' than with saying that the Temple is no longer the way to be in right relationship with God.

According to John, Jesus is the new, living temple of God's presence and the meeting place between God and his people. Jesus is the way to be in right relationship with God and neighbour.

In our Catholic tradition we often refer to ourselves as 'temples of the Holy Spirit'. We recognise that we are sacred beings destined for union with God, people in whom the reign of God's goodness should be clearly seen in word, thought and action.

Lent is a time to decide what our life is about and what is important. Like Jesus in the Temple maybe we need to put an end to ways of thinking and behaving which clutter our lives, obscure God's presence and fail to bring life to others.

As members of the Body of Christ we, too, are to be the place where God is found on earth.