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CREATIVE JUSTICE FLOWS FROM THE TEMPLE OF GOD

By David C. Robinson, SJ

From Today's Readings

“Wherever the river flows, every sort of living creature that can multiply shall live, and there shall be abundant fish, for wherever this water comes the sea shall be made fresh. ... Along both banks of the river, fruit trees of every kind shall grow; their leaves shall not fade, nor their fruit fail. Every month they shall bear fresh fruit, for they shall be watered by the flow from the sanctuary. Their fruit shall serve for food, and their leaves for medicine.”

EZEKIEL 47:9, 12

Since the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple area those who sold oxen, sheep, and doves, as well as money-changers seated there. He made a whip of cords and drove them from the temple area, with the sheep and oxen, and spilled the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Take

these out of here, and stop making my Father's house a marketplace."

JOHN 2:13-16

Reflection

As the Hebrew tribes matured through the transformations of the Mosaic Covenant, the Exodus, the entrance into Canaan, and all the subsequent changes as they stood on the 'world stage' of their day—they grew into a unique identity. They fell in and out of commitment to the structure of the Law and the religious practice of the Temple. Through the life of Ezekiel in the early years of the 6th Century BCE, as well as the life of Jesus some 600 years later, the identity of the people within a life of Covenant and Temple practice was in a constant state of flux and self-exploration.

Born into a priestly, educated family, Ezekiel was taken in the second wave of the Babylonian exile. Therefore, his prophetic career was colored by his Temple formation, and he looked to a New Temple in the future. He understood the Mosaic Law, but also foresaw the changes in the Law which historical realities would make necessary. It is from this framework that this selection derives. The prophet's vision of the river flowing from the foundations of the Temple-to-be embodied his hope for a purification and new dedication of the people to the enlivening and inspiring traditions of Covenant and Ritual. The trees and the fruit articulated the promise of who and what God's people could be. In chapters 45-47, he exhorted them to recognize God's timeless commandments of justice, compassion, and community solidarity. The illumination of the Law was to be the basis of virtue and faith that shaped their fidelity to their new life within the Temple.

Some 600 years later, Jesus confronted the same complexities of Law and Temple in the confounding of a people subjugated to the monolith of Roman power and domination. He recognized the confusion and even desperation of a nation whose destiny seemed to have been immolated on the altar of conquest and subjugation. Yet, he also knew the power and transformative grace of what had led them through endless exile, war, and suffocating colonialism. He knew the tender blessing of an Abba who loved his children beyond definition or measure. Yet he also knew the pragmatic wisdom of both Law and Temple that had defined the path of a people who knew both illumination and disaster on an ever-changing path to God's promise fulfilled. Thus, when he viewed those who fostered the commercialization of worship and the cynicism of blessings-for-sale, he responded with the righteous fervor of Ezekiel, and drove them out. He incarnated the traditions of his ancestry and respected their worth, but recognized that they were to be observed within the overarching grace

embraced in the commandment to love God and to love one's neighbor.

In our own time and place, Christian communities of many types have labored to establish their own sense of Covenant with God, and a religious practice within the 'temple' of their churches. Doctrines, dogmas, and theological traditions have established the new face of God's 'law' for a modern age. Their religious rituals have framed the 'temple practice' of our time. We struggle, as did our ancestors, with the boundaries of our historical structures and their role in our common path. Yet, in our best moments, we are also open to the workings of the Spirit in the world, as we learn to navigate a context constantly evolving in its familial, social, spiritual, and religious self-awareness. We are God's throughout time, but also are held in the living embrace of the God who 'makes all things new' in our journey through historical realities and new possibilities. To the extent we assume that what we have known is the absolute hallmark of all that is to come, we deny the divine initiative. Our Genesis is being revealed in real time, unveiling the mystery of the One who will always challenge and surprise us with a vision of our destiny that bears the stamp of our past, but also beckons us forward to a mystically profound new future.



Jesus Drives Out the Moneylenders from the Temple
Image created by David Robinson, S.J.

For Pondering

- In your own spiritual and religious formation, what are the traditions that have most shaped your self-understanding?
- What realities in your day-to-day life have nuanced or changed your perception of how God is working in you and your world?
- How might you share your evolving awareness of God with those who share similar experiences and history?

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