

Harvest Sunday Study Guide - 6th October

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written", he said to them, "my house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a 'den of robbers'". The blind & the lame came to him at the temple and he healed them. (Matthew 21:12-14)

1. Do we consider that, when we read the Bible, it has been written by and for people living under occupation and empire, who often experience exploitation and oppression? What does it feel like for those of us reading the Bible who don't have experience of this kind of injustice and are from a country with a history of empire and power? If we are from countries that have experienced life under oppression, how do we read the Bible differently from those who haven't?
2. During this passage, Jesus turns over the tables because of who is benefitting (and not benefitting) from the trading in the temple and because the trading was blocking all people from accessing God's house. His action was a prophetic demonstration of who is included in God's kingdom. How might we look for and notice the prophets in today's society?
3. Jesus spends a lot of his time demonstrating that in his Kingdom, the last shall be first, often by healing, talking to or performing miracles on people who have been excluded from society. Can we think of other examples where Jesus has brought transformation to a person's life, whilst also saying something wider about the systemic injustice in society?
4. Once Jesus has turned over the tables in the temple, there is immediately room for those who are ill and in need of healing, to get into the temple. What barriers might we put up in our own church community that may be stopping those who need healing, from finding their way in?
5. How do we think we can make way for minority voices and groups in our own lives, to tell us something important about God?
6. What examples of exploitation and injustice do we see around us today? What do you think we can do about it, as individuals and collectively? You might want to think about big, systemic issues, as well as things that might be happening in our schools, colleges, workplaces, board rooms, playgrounds, care homes and churches.

If you are struggling for examples, you might want to begin by thinking about Universal Credit, a social security benefit given to people who are unable to work or don't earn enough through their work to get by. At the moment, the basic rate of Universal Credit is £91 a week and research conducted by Trussell has shown that half of people claiming Universal Credit, ran out of food in the last month, with no money to buy more. We are calling on the government to guarantee a minimum income that ensures that people have enough money to afford the essentials to get by. To find out more, visit: <https://www.trussell.org.uk/support-us/guarantee-our-essentials>

7. The story of the cross tells us that Jesus, was put to death by an oppressive regime. In rising from the dead, this tells us about where the true powers and principalities really lie. How might we continue to use the resurrection, to bring hope in seemingly impossible and unjust circumstances? What power might we need to give up in order to bring God's Kingdom here on Earth?

Spend some time today, praying for those who are subject to exploitation, oppression and injustice. As we thank God for our food today, you may especially want to focus on those who don't have enough money to afford essentials and need to turn to a food bank. Pray that food banks have enough resources to continue to meet the increasingly complex needs of people, and for our government, that they would implement policies that guarantee that everyone has enough money to afford the essentials.