

Mark 11: 12-26

It's the morning after the day before. Yesterday the crowds cheered Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. In Jerusalem, he went straight to the temple and "looked around at everything". It makes him sound a bit like a tourist. Maybe he did more than just admire the architecture, perhaps he was examining and inspecting the temple. Dare I use the J word? Perhaps he was judging it? If so, what was he hoping to find? What is the measure by which he judges?

As the week goes on Jesus will have conversations with the religious leaders. In one of these discussions, he will be asked which commandment is the most important. He will choose two. They can't be separated. They belong together. First, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength". Then, second, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". That I suggest is the measure by which he judges. He looked around at everything in the temple, he examined it to see whether he could find evidence of love; love for God and love for others.

Jesus and his friends are staying at the home of Simon the leper. The word leprosy is used for a number of different diseases, some more serious than others. All those who had leprosy were automatically excluded from ordinary society. As far as Jesus is concerned that is wrong. It fails the test of love. Jesus accepts the welcome of those who usually get pushed out. He rides into Jerusalem as king, but he's a king who makes his home with the outsiders, with the people on the edge of society.

Having spent the night at Simon's, Jesus and his friends make their way back to Jerusalem. Jesus is hungry. Did he forget to have breakfast? Was Simon a generous host but not able to stretch what he had to so many extra mouths? Or maybe it's a different kind of hunger? Jesus had been looking for love in the temple. Perhaps that is his hunger. He is hungry to find love in the world.

He sees a fig tree. He goes to see whether there is any fruit on it. He examines the tree as yesterday he examined the temple. There are plenty of leaves, but no fruit. Actually, it's not the season for figs so the poor old tree cannot be blamed. Nevertheless, Jesus curses it. He says, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again".

We have to say that Jesus is being too harsh with the tree. But how about if it's a symbolic tree. Jesus comes looking for fruit, but finds only leaves. He comes looking for love but finds only a display of it in fine words and gestures.

Yesterday people spread leaves on the way before Jesus. There were actual leaves cut from the fields, but also symbolic leaves. There were the leaves of their words. They sang his praises as they shouted "Hosanna". There were the leaves of their gestures. They rolled out the red carpet with their cloaks. Their gesture was saying "All we have and all we are we give to you". But were they really ready to produce what he was hungry to find, the fruit of love?

Perhaps each one of us is the tree that Jesus examines. Don't forget that Jesus looks at you humbly and lovingly. Don't forget that the voice of God assures you that you are God's beloved child in whom God is well pleased. Don't forget that when Jesus examines you, he does it not like a harsh inspector who is keen to condemn your faults, but like a doctor or therapist who diagnoses problems in order to heal you and make you well. Having said that, we can all always do better and it is healthy to hold ourselves before the clear gaze of Jesus who is hungry to find in us the fruit of love.

God bless you,

Tony