

Reading: Matthew 21:12-16

Now, when you heard the Gospel reading this morning, you probably thought, “What kind of reading is that, for a church reopening?” “Jesus overturning tables, wrecking pieces of a place of worship”?

The most common focus for people when encountering this passage, is clearly Jesus overturning the tables. Yet, what happens directly after that is often overlooked and forgotten.

The issue Jesus has with those he chased out, is that they had forgotten the role that the temple was supposed to play in the lives of the worshippers.

The temple was supposed to be a place that reflected the very nature of God. A place of Holiness, sacredness, repentance, and cleansing.

It was to be a vital part of the Jewish society, culture and faith.

The money changers were a visible example of the corruption that was present. They charged exorbitant commissions when people would change foreign currency (which was not acceptable in the temple) into acceptable currency for giving.

They symbolised the wider dysfunction in the temple; and so seeing them driven out is a also deeply symbolic.

What is overlooked or ignored is what happened after the money changers had left.

“¹⁴The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them. ¹⁵But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple courts, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.”

The Temple’s function had been to facilitate the intertwining of humans and the divine; yet, it had become a place of power, control, and a corruption of what The Lord had instructed people to be.

What do we see with the influx of people?

Where there had been a focus on money and greed, there was a focus on welcome. Those coming in were not supposed to be there- the outcasts of the day being welcomed into a space of worship.

Where there had been corruption, there was now praise and worship of Jesus.

We see the temple being a place that facilitates the intertwining of humans and the divine presence of Jesus.

The temple, at that moment, being what it should be. A sacred place of welcome, not exclusion. A place of liberation, not power. A place that reflected God’s nature through the people that filled it.

What brings the temple life, besides God’s presence? It’s people, isn’t it?

So, what kind of reading is this reading, for a church reopening?

Well, it is the best kind, as it offers hope and a reminder.

When we read of people filling the space with praise and worshiping Jesus and not following the human made rules, we see what a new beginning looks like.

When we see the consequences of letting culture dominate faith, we are reminded that this where must always reflect Christ first and foremost, and not culture.

When we think about the future of this where, we know that it is people; and those people who are not yet filling this space. Not for the sake of numbers, but because the Hope, peace, joy, love, freedom, and community we find in Jesus, is needed more than ever before.

We have want this place to be a place that reflects our journey as people of faith, and as people who want to be salt and light to our community, a place where people can continue to say, sing praises and worship Jesus, and where the only movement of tables is as we prepare to share kai after our services together.

Keeping people as our focus, I want to move into the next part of this service.

We, as a people of faith, acknowledge that The Lord has led us to this point, and our presence in this space testifies to that. Yet, our earthquake strengthening journey has been an incredible combination of the divine and human.

Countless minds, hearts, and hands have played a role in getting us today, and I do mean countless. Let me explain what I mean.

Church members- past and present. Vesties, wardens, builders, hire companies, Engineers, designers, electricians, fire engineers, lighting designers, Glaziers, our amazing Parish Administrator, Audio Visual experts, commercial cleaners, fundraisers, donors, our Diocesan Council and Board of Trustees, Anglican Centre staff, Hutt City council engineers, building inspectors, and staff, cell tower technicians, organ experts, peer review engineers, and those from other churches with similar journeys.

I want to draw your attention to any one of the steel plates around this building. Each time our gaze will fall upon them, we should be reminded of all those who played a part- no matter how big or small, in getting to this point. I want to take some time to mention some specific people, and I offer my deepest apologies if I miss anyone.

I want to acknowledge Michael Jameson, Murray Isdale, and Dave Comparini, who all passed away during our EQ journey. At the start of our journey, their commitment, professionalism, and heart for St Paul's is not forgotten; and here at the end of our journey, I express my deep and heartfelt thanks for their involvement at the start of it.

We would not be where we are today without them; yet, it is fitting that we acknowledge the impact of their loss on their family members who miss them still.

I want to acknowledge former and current members of the Anglican Centre, who were incredibly supportive of our journey. Rob Moonlight, Nick Young, Ben Pringle, Sisi Fountain, and our Board of Trustees and Diocese Council, as well as Bishop's Justin and Ana.

We have not been on this journey alone, and I want to acknowledge their leadership, prayers, from the entire team.

While we met in the hall and chapel, we were blessed to gather with our sisters and brothers at Waiwhetu Uniting on different occasions. While we have loved being in our wee chapel, it was always significant to gather in their church- I want to thank Rev Graeme and Verity on behalf of the wider Uniting Family.

It is good to be able to host you at our place and repay you for the amazing welcome and hospitality that you showed us.

One of the hardships we faced, was that we lost the ability to farewell those who have died over the past 8 years. I am deeply grateful to Rev Annette Cater, and the St James family for allowing us to use their church for funeral services; which also spoke to the shared history we have with our sisters and brothers there.

I want thank Peter Johnson and the team at New Zealand Consulting Engineers Ltd or as we knew them- NZCEL. They have proved invaluable partners as they sought new options for existing challenges; they have gone above and beyond our expectations. They have used small words when talking to me, and they have been a constant presence in our journey. While we are a smaller project, on the grand scheme of engineering projects, not once have we felt anything other than a valued client and project.

I want to thank Malcolm Hammond and the team from MJH, who were at the pointy end of the years of work by NZCEL. Malcolm and the team, like NZCEL, at no time made us feel like a tiny project; they were flexible with the various activities that go on in this place, and they went above and beyond in the work they complete here. I also want to make a special mention of Colin, who also endured me wandering in and out during my workdays- I always appreciated the updates.

Here at St Paul's, there are also those who, due to their role as Wardens, clergy, works committees, or being a member (for a time) on our *Seismic review committee*, worked on behalf of the parish.

I want to thank (in no particular order) Alyth Begg, Tony Martin, Malcolm Freebairn, Maggie Davies, Josephine Lewis, Neil Hamilton, Jon Screech, Derek Keatly, Colin Datchler, Janet Tait, Ravi Casinader, Kaz Yung, Colin Lewis, Wayne Paaka, Sally Grey, Mary Driver, Richard Brazack, Steven Douglas, Jade Badcock, Simon Falconer, Dennis Page, and all who have served on Vestry since the beginning of St Paul's EQ journey in 2012. I do offer my sincere apologies if there are those whom I missed.

Now there are three names missing, and I have saved them till now- although they are not the last thanks I have, as I still have the VIP's to thank, at the end of my korero.

Now, in 2017, I had a cup of coffee with Colin Hickling, who offered to take the lead with our EQ journey, and he soon established our *Seismic Review Committee* alongside Murray Macgregor. Others have spent time on that committee, but most recently, they were joined by Phil Mitchell. I suspect that, as Colin and I drank coffee and talked, that neither of us knew how long this journey would take, and I remain indebted to him (and the SRC).

How do we express our thanks and admiration for all the years of work put in on our behalf? What words can we use that capture how indebted we are for the years of commitment, time, skill, tenacity, passion, and energy that you have each put in.

To be honest, I don't know.

In fact, I don't know where we would be if I had not had that cup of coffee with Colin.

I don't know where we would be without Murray's constant presence, fixing, model making and questions of council.

I don't where we would be without Phil's wrangling and wrestling on behalf of St Paul's, not to mention the various bits of paperwork he always seemed to be signing or filling out.

What I do know is that we would not be seated here today.

Yet we are, and on behalf of St Paul's Waiwhetu, I want to offer my deep thanks and admiration to you three.

What I do know is that neither of these three men want to put on the spot or made a fuss of; but I would like each of them to come forward as I present a small token to each of them, to say more than we could ever say as a church.

Lastly, I want to thank the VIP's- those who call St Paul's home. While all this activity has gone on around you, you have persevered, endured, hoped, prayed, sang, worshipped, and kept moving forward. While all this activity has gone on, you have loved, cared for, served, welcomed, and been salt and light to all around you. I have never been prouder of a church family, and I cannot thank you enough!

In closing, I am lost for words, and so I want to do the most fitting thing we can do in this place and close with prayer.

Let's pray.