

Based on John 2: 13-22

The passage we have heard is about claims made regarding the identity of Jesus and the various responses to those claims. The disciples certainly seemed to connect Jesus to what they understood to be the fulfilment of scripture, but they did not always seem to understand who he really was. Some people failed to understand Jesus at all and as we know, some were even violently opposed to him.

At the wedding at Cana and at the 'cleansing of the Temple', Jesus doesn't say much and seems quite elusive. His actions in these situations certainly 'speak louder' than many words would have done, and his actions also manage to provoke strong responses.

In the story at Cana, when he produces large quantities of wine, there is a huge amount of symbolism. There is the obvious indication that, because of who he is, Jesus can bring enormous gifts to human beings and then in *response* to his actions, we are told that the disciples believed in him.

In the scene at the Temple, Jesus takes a quite different kind of action but once again it's the *response* to what he does that forms the key to the story. In the Temple area, Jesus finds people who sell animals for sacrifice and other people who exchange ordinary coins for special ones that can be used for the 'Temple tax'. We are told that he drives all of them out and tells them not to turn his Father's house into a marketplace. There is a strong sense of the identity and the authority that Jesus possesses.

But while the disciples identify Jesus in a positive way, his enemies, whom the writer of the Gospel of John regularly refers to as 'the Jews' question Jesus' actions. This in turn leads to Jesus making the claim about raising up the 'Temple' in three days.

So, for everyone concerned, what becomes more important and more of a focus isn't the abusive use of the Temple premises but questions about who Jesus is and what gives him the right or authority to challenge what is going on.

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We know, from various places in scripture, that questions about Jesus' identity and authority usually call for a response of some sort. In this passage from the Gospel of John, the presence, and the actions of Jesus both challenge people around him to make decisions about him. In the scene in the Temple, the reaction of Jesus to the abusive use of the premises and its procedures gives the disciples a bit more insight about him and when the disciples also connect Jesus' actions with Psalm 69:9 "Zeal for your house will consume me", their faith is strengthened. In some translations, 69:9 reads: "My devotion to your temple burns in me like fire, the insults which are hurled on you, fall on me."

Jesus statement about raising up "the temple of his body" helps the disciples to understand about his crucifixion and resurrection. Although that understanding only comes after the resurrection, it's inclusion by the Gospel writer in this passage is meant, I think, to help those of us who read the words to understand that the disciples' decision about Jesus will be a decision for faith.

The people whom the Gospel writer refers to as "the Jews" demonstrate a distinct and contrasting lack of understanding. Immediately after the disciples' perception of the 'zeal' of Jesus, they ask a question which makes it obvious that they just don't understand at all. Verse 18 "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Also, they don't seem to take the statements by Jesus about 'raising the temple' very seriously. They point out that it has taken 46 years to build. They really don't 'get' that he is talking about it as his body.

The reaction and the choices about Jesus that the Jews and probably much of the world were likely to make, were becoming painfully obvious already. We know that this story appears in all the Gospels but in the Gospel of John it has been placed at the start of the ministry of Jesus. In the others, it is just before the Passion and plotting accounts but its location in John doesn't remove the sense of danger that the others have. Just before our text in John 2, verse 4 Jesus refers to "the hour" that is to come. Well, in our passage, he has demonstrated what is going to bring that "hour". It's his challenge to the world as it is and the inability or unwillingness of the world to hear what he is saying and to respond to the challenge. Amen.