

JOHN 2:13-22
CLEARING THE WAY

Take a sweetie jar; this is a picture of life!

Fill it with tennis balls; we managed 4 of them? The tennis balls are the big things in our lives – what might these big things be? Space for them is top priority! *Love God, faith; love other people; family; work.* Is the jar full?

Add small wooden beads; these should fill the spaces beside the large stones – the beads represent things we have to do in life – what might these be? *Shopping etc.* Is the jar full?

Take some tiny hama beads; pour these into the jar and given time to do it properly these should fill all the spaces between the tennis balls and the beads. The hama beads represent the things we choose to do, little things; what might these be? *Leisure, golf, football, going to the pictures, holidays*

Is jar full? Yes!

Now imagine if we filled the jar with the hama beads first! Would there have been room for the tennis balls? No! The jar would have been filled with the hama beads and there would have been no room for the tennis balls at all. Some people have lives that are full of the little things that we choose to do, things that we enjoy perhaps, but are not the most important things in life and then they have no space for the big things, no space for God or faith.

Jesus found a group of people like that in the Temple of all places. The Temple was built in the centre of Jerusalem, built as place for people to worship God; it was built to help people remember how great God is, how big, strong and mighty God is; it was the place where people could come to worship God, to sing songs, to pray, to bring their offerings and remember how great God is and how much God loves us. One day Jesus went into the temple to visit; He found people selling animals for the sacrifices in the temple, selling cattle, sheep, and doves to people who had travelled to Jerusalem to temple for the great festival; He found people changing money for travellers – they could only use the special temple money in the temple and not the ordinary money from their pocket or purse and so they had to change their money and the people who were changing it were charging lots to do the transaction and were cheating the travellers.

Jesus was angry. He was so angry that He chased the animals and the people selling them out of the temple; He was so angry that He grabbed the tables of the money-changers and tipped them all up and turned them all over and chased these men out of the temple too. *“How dare you turn my Father’s house into a market.”* Their lives were full of just the little things, making money for themselves even if it meant cheating others and making the temple a noisy place; there was no room in their lives for big things, no room for God. The Temple was supposed to be a place where people remembered God and prayed, but it was too noisy to pray, and these money-changers were cheating the people who came to worship as well. There was no room for God, no space to love God or love other people. So Jesus was angry and threw them out of temple.

If this jar is a picture of our lives, then we need to remember God, to remember to make space for the most important things in life and these are to love God and love other people. Other things will sometimes get in the way, but we have to keep making the right choices in life, making sure that we remember what God is like and what God has done; making sure that we remember to love God with our heart and soul and that we remember to love other people and care for people in need. These are the big things, the “tennis ball” things in our lives and we need to always make space for them. Church helps us to remember God and to love God; the communion service with its bread and wine to share helps us remember how Jesus has loved

us by dying on the cross and how important that it for us; it helps us remember these big things.

God's presence touches every one of these bits of our lives, big things and little things and things in between. God is with us everywhere we go and His presence touches every part of our lives if we let Him. His presence touches the big things: He helps us to love God and to love other people. His presence touches the in between things, the things we have to do and He goes with us then too. His presence touches the little things that we do, and everywhere we go. God is with us to love us and care for us.

Jesus found people who had no space for God, but their lives were filled with all kinds of little things; He was angry that not only were they not remembering to love God, but that they were stopping other people from doing the big things too and so He threw them out of the temple. Remember to make room for God; remember to make room to love other people – these are the big things in life.

Focus on the Cross 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Communion has its focus firmly on the cross. The whole language of the service, the whole imagery of the service is about the cross, about the death of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. The cross is the symbol of Christian faith because it is central to all that Jesus came to do and to all that He has done for us. This was the big issue for Jesus: everything else that He did had to fit around the cross: His miracles, His teaching, His stories - everything else that He did had to fit around the cross because that was the reason for His coming into the world in the first place. He sat round the table with His friends; they shared the Passover meal, but Jesus gave it a whole new twist when He spoke about the bread as His body and the wine as His blood – the focus was on the cross that was to happen the following day.

But this is not always a straightforward message! Paul knows that the cross is important; he describes *"the message..."* (1 Corinthians 1:18) There are two ideas that matter:

1. The Cross is foolishness and we can see why people think like that. The Jews didn't like the idea because they couldn't cope with the idea that the Messiah was crucified and so the cross became a total stumbling-block for them; others just thought the idea was daft, that someone killed by the Romans on a cross could be the Saviour; they just didn't see how it could possibly work. It is not a million miles away from lots of people's thinking today – Christmas we understand because we grasp the importance of the birth of a baby; but death, crucifixion – how does that work? The cross seems foolish.
2. The Cross is weakness – dying is weak, it is the end of things; when it happens to a young person it seems a tragedy. How can this be God at work? How can this possibly be the reason for Jesus' coming? Is this not just the waste of a good, young life? We visited a church in Budapest a couple of years ago and like lots of cathedral-like churches, there was lots of gold, lots of crowns, lots of thrones and the symbols of power and we like that; we like to see these symbols of power because they show a church that is strong and powerful and able to stand up to the other powers in the world. But I look at this and wonder how it sits with a church whose Saviour was crucified in weakness!

"Christ the power of God and Christ the wisdom of God." The cross works and the cross was the right thing to do. *"It is finished"* and our first thought is that this is a cry of dereliction, life is ended, there is no more! But actually, it is a cry of achievement: "I've done it; I've achieved all that I set out to do!" Salvation is achieved on the cross. It was the right thing to do because it is just what we needed – a Saviour who takes away our sin, and the cross and His dying was the way to do that. "He died that we might be forgiven". It was just the right thing to do for God to achieve what He set out to achieve. So the focus is on the cross: in the gospel, in the church, in Christian faith, in the communion service, the focus is on the cross.