

Jesus and the cleansing of the temple

John 1.13ff

As told by a blind person

I was sitting by one the temple gates leading into the courtyard asking for alms. The sun was hot on my face. I could hear the footsteps of people passing up and down, the many sounds of voices, the clatter and trot of passing animals in the streets. Somewhere a dog was howling. It was just a normal day in busy Jerusalem.

The temple too, was just as busy. I could hear the traders calling out the prices of the animals for sacrifice and the voices of others coming to buy and trying to get a bargain. I could hear the low rumble of the cattle and the bleating of sheep and underneath the soft cooing of doves. Above these animal noises I could also hear the clink and rasp of coins as people came to change money so they could pay the temple tax. It was nearly Passover so many people were milling in and out. Sometimes the rough cloth of their garments flapped against my face and once someone stepped on me.

For a while a breeze got up, bringing to my nostrils the stink of animal dung and sweaty bodies. Underneath this raw smell were other scents, wood smells of pine and cedar, oils and spices and the smell of cooking food. There was the smell of baked earth and smoke. I could smell the warm breath of animals and the hot metallic smell of the coins. There were smells of anxiety and hurry, of pleasure in profit. I could imagine the emotions of the traders even if I could not see their faces. Somewhere in it all was the scent of holiness, of prayer made real, but it was like a small almost forgotten note in the busyness of those in and around the temple.

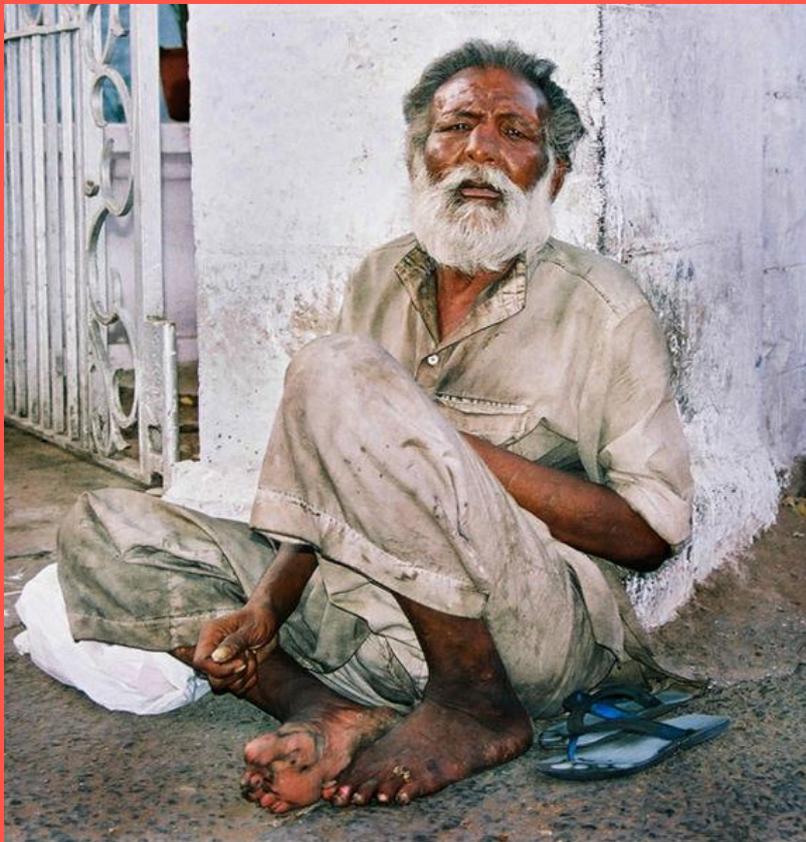
Suddenly the sounds and smells seemed to change. I became aware of a person near me. I felt his gaze on me and I thought for a moment that he was aware of everything I could hear and smell and touch as keenly as I could. I had no opportunity to ponder this further as suddenly I felt his energy and power as he entered the temple on a swift and determined mission. Others were with him and they were clearly taken aback by his sudden emotion. I could hear them calling 'What is it, Rabbi?' and then a flurry of whispers 'What's going on, what's he doing?'

The man came out again searching for something. I heard him take up some rope and start knotting it. What was he going to do? Was he going to beat someone? Would he beat me for begging – it wouldn't be the first time. I was afraid. Then the man went back into the temple area and started shouting at the traders. There was pandemonium as they shouted back and the animals made even more noise. The wings of doves were thrashing, animal hoofs were stamping and the traders were protesting. Then I heard the knotted cords whistling through the air, knocking the coins to the floor where they tinkled and rang into corners. There were shrieks of outrage. Then I heard tables overturning and the noise of things breaking, people howling and animals bellowing. I heard the sound and felt the tremor of feet

as people ran out of the temple shouting 'He's mad! It's that man they call Jesus, the son of Joseph, - he's mad!' There was the drumming and clapping of animal feet as they ran out and ran away.

Now I could hear the man called Jesus. He was saying firmly to the dove-sellers 'Take these things out of here!' and to the peddlers of sacrificial animals 'stop making my Father's house a marketplace'. His friends heard this and said to each other 'it is written in our scripture: zeal for your house will consume me'. That's what's happening. He's reclaiming the temple for his Father.

I listened even more closely as the hubbub quietened down and the angry traders moved away gathering up their belongings and their money. Suddenly there was a wonderful stillness in the temple. I could hear the man called Jesus quietly giving thanks to God. And then I knew why he had done it. The temple was to be a place of communication with God, a house of prayer and teaching for everyone, not a marketplace. He had created a space to focus on God undisturbed.



Beggar in Pune, India, by Lukas VanDyke