

## ***On the Spot***

**John 2:13-22; Ephesians 4:26**

**Rev. Barbara A. Frey**

**March 3, 2013**

What an entrance Jesus made! Jesus steps onto the temple court during the Passover. Remember, Passover is that special "religious" festival commemorating God's liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, the most awesome event in their history. Jerusalem was a happening place on Passover. Imagine crowds of 2.5 million pilgrims (according to historian Josephus), plus the thousands of cattle, sheep and doves brought to town for sacrificial slaughter! All of this for the "religious" celebration and, instead, Jesus steps into the temple court and finds it rocking with everything but religion.

This passage is referred to as "Jesus cleansing the temple." Jesus comes to the temple with a wake-up call. The so-called "mighty" are about to fall.

Instead of the temple being a holy place (its core identity and function), the temple had become a shopping mall (money changers and sellers made a profit selling sacrificial animals to the people, especially the poor), bank (the treasury and records of debt were administered there), and government building (the high priest, a Roman appointee, and the scribal lawyers had their offices there). As if all that wasn't enough, the temple also had become a revolutionary symbol for the zealots.

So, Jesus walked right in and drove out the sellers, which effectively shut down the temple's sacrificial function for a brief time. Jesus was definitely upset and he reacted with anger! Making a whip of cords, he drove the sheep and the cattle out of the temple. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables, before saying, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:13-16).

Jesus got pushed too far. Enough's enough! Jesus' rampage in the temple was partly a reaction against the intrusions of unholy noise and unholy images into this sanctuary of holy silence.

I see the holy outrage that Jesus brings to the temple (and to the injustice of what's happening there) as a call that puts you **on the spot**. Jesus took a stand and got angry, but, instead of immediately exiting the scene, he justified his anger by creating a teachable moment and doing something to resolve his anger so he could move on. When I look deep within myself and as I look out at you, I sometimes wonder *where is my holy outrage*, and I wonder *where is your holy outrage*? What will get the fire in you burning? Will it be a story, such as Newtown, with its spotlight on violence, guns and mental illness, or a natural disaster that causes destruction and loss? Perhaps it is the environment or some issue or situation closer to home that directly impacts you and your family and friends. How are we put **on the spot** and challenged to consider our responsibility to God and each other?

I remember a time in the past when I felt **on the spot**, where all my feelings, my convictions, my emotions were just swirling: I was feeling holy outrage about the situation in El Salvador at that time. Through a sister church relationship with the Pan de Vida (Bread of Life) Church in El Salvador, I had an opportunity to meet their pastor and his family and to learn of his congregation's struggle to survive; I was also able to participate in providing education and self-help in an extended relationship and through a mission trip that brought us face-to-face with the terrors and poverty that these people endured daily.

The pastor from the Pan de Vida Church shared many stories with us. The story of Archbishop Oscar Romero, especially, had an impact on me. The archbishop was very angry at the right wing death squads which continue to murder so many priests and peasants in El Salvador. He boldly addressed the people over the diocesan radio program, denouncing the government for supporting the death squads. The Archbishop spoke directly to soldiers, telling, no, ordering them to not obey the unjust commands of their superiors to kill peasants. This act of defiance from the once mild-mannered priest is equivalent to Jesus' challenge to the authority of his enemies by marching into the Jerusalem temple and driving out those who were desecrating it. Like the El Salvadoran government, the temple leaders were challenged at the very basis of their power. They either had to repent and change their ways or get rid of the challenger.

Today, I am feeling **on the spot** in regard to violence and gun control, and I feel a responsibility to God, my immediate community and the wider community, as well as to my grandchildren. A few weeks ago, a friend in our congregation went to a gathering in Hartford to take a stand on this issue and to listen to the speakers. In sharing his experience, he asked me if First Church was doing anything on this issue. His question stayed with me and I began exploring the United Church of Christ website. During that week, I was invited by the group, Faiths United to Prevent Gun Violence, to join other clergy in signing a letter to state legislators that supports stronger gun laws. The interfaith council of SW CT is encouraging churches to observe March 15-17 as Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath with letter writing, prayer, preaching, and more. The interfaith group is advocating that, as people of faith who are seriously feeling **on the spot** about this issue, we can change the conversation, change the culture, change the laws. At 9:30 AM each Friday (the time of the Sandy Hook shooting), I am joining others by calling my legislator. I also hope to attend a program at the University of Hartford on March 14 to hear Marion Wright Edelman (founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund) keynote "End the Culture of Violence."

As you consider whether you have a call that puts you **on the spot** for an issue that fires you up to take an active stand, I want to share some thoughts that may be helpful in your discernment.

Miroslav Volf, who taught at Yale Divinity School, claims in an April 2002 article, "More Religion, More Violence" for the Christian Century, that what we need is not less religion, but, in a carefully qualified sense, more religion. We must practice our faith in an authentic way, instead of being card-carrying Christians. We are challenged to

consider what God would think of our actions and attitudes and how we are put **on the spot because of our faith**. We are called to be apostles of peace and justice in our world, and not just hear about them at church on a Sunday morning.

In his book, *The "I Can" Attitude*, Dennis Oliver states: "As you clarify and deepen your understanding of your foundational values, you will also develop your ability to give your life integrity and purpose."

Even Aristotle, in his own wise way, back in the ancient world, advocated for persons to take that risk to be **on the spot**. Aristotle said "the man who gets angry at the right things and with the right people and in the right way and at the right time and for the right length of time, is commended."

Lastly, from Jesus, we are reminded that the way of Jesus is different from the way of the world. By his righteous anger, Jesus gave notice that he was challenging the seat of power and standing on the side of the powerless.

We are called to follow the One whose righteous anger challenged the powerful. We are called to be put **on the spot** and do what might seem foolish in the eyes of the world, because it is the right thing to do. We can recount stories of those who were put **on the spot** and had to respond—Rosa Parks, Desmond Tutu, Mahatma Gandhi, and others who had the courage to stand up for and be **on the spot** for what was right.

Jesus' actions remind us that discipleship is a very active, not passive, calling. And sometimes it can get unpleasant. There's no doubt that whether or not Jesus had enemies before he set foot on the temple court, he certainly had them after he left.

Here's the deal: There is a lot to get angry about in our world, and it is about time that we did get angry and be put **on the spot** because of our faith convictions. When Jesus drove the money changers from the temple, he was signaling the possibility of radical change. **It's possible for us to do the same, in our own time! It's possible for us to do the same, in our own time! Amen!**

© 2012 Barbara A. Frey, all rights reserved

**First Church of Christ Congregational**  
12 South Main Street, West Hartford, Connecticut 06107  
860.233.9605 [www.whfirstchurch.org](http://www.whfirstchurch.org)

