

Speaker 1:

Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Speaker 1:

Welcome to morning prayers. Please rise as you are able and join in our responsive reading, Psalm 117. Praise the Lord all nations, extol him all peoples.

Audience:

For great is his steadfast love toward us and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord.

Speaker 1:

You may be seated.

(Singing)

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew 21:12-17. Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers." Good morning.

Audience:

Good morning.

Speaker 1:

As many in my life know I grew up in a secular multi-faith family. My mom is Jewish and my dad is Catholic, and I was raised quite secularly. Today, although I attend this church, I do not identify as Christian. Inter and multi-faith relations are deeply important to me. At Harvard it's what I have centered my free time and extracurriculars around, and I truly believe that deep interfaith conversation, friendship, and advocacy is a tool for peace and justice in the world around us.

Today I want to talk about an interpretation of this passage and things I had learned from Amy-Jill Levine, a Jewish scholar of the Christian New Testament, and those including Christians who have drawn on her work about this passage and the ways it has been used to promote Christian antisemitism. In Christian progressive spaces this passage is often invoked as an example of Jesus standing for justice, flipping the tables of extortionary moneylenders and evicting them from the temple. However, an interaction on Twitter of all places helped me to understand the way that Christian antisemitism is at work in the reading and history of this passage. In my memory of the thread, long since lost me because of the black hole of the internet and the unraveling of the platform now known as X. A clear progressive Christian I followed, reflected on the way that her Jesus was not quiet, solemn, peaceful, but radical and action oriented.

Her God flipped tables in support of the economically oppressed. I was surprised to see that the next tweet in the thread was an apology for the ways that she had unintentionally invoked antisemitic tropes. I wanted to learn more. This passage exists in all four gospels with slight variations, though my

understanding is that the Matthew passage I read is the most cited. In John, Jesus makes a whip out of cords to draw [inaudible 00:11:06] the many lenders, or rather the money changers and their animals from the temple, an image which often makes its way into art and movies. It is after all a cinematic image. And the dominant narrative within Christianity is that Jesus was protesting economic exploitation and moneylenders rather than money changers. Before we begin to look at what was happening in the temple, we should look at the antisemitic tropes that this reading promotes. There's a long history of antisemitism connected to tropes of greediness and money lending, and this passage which many interpret as Jesus decrying the temple, the center of Jewish worship at the time as corrupt and needing new systems has been linked to Christian supersessionism.

So how can we look at this story differently? What was happening at the temple? Why were there animals and booths exchanging money? Well, to start, the temple in Jerusalem was a site of holy pilgrimage where Jews traveled from every nation under heaven for the festivals of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot. The temple was the only place to make sacrifices and with pilgrim's traveling long distances to do so, they purchased their sacrifices upon arrival to avoid them being damaged. And of course, they also arrived with different currencies. Levine writes, "Despite Hollywood and sermon after sermon, there's no indication that the vendors were overcharging or exploiting the population." These money changers offered ways for Jewish people to participate in sacred acts with fair practices and a knowledge of the physical requirements for animal sacrifice. So why did Jesus flip the tables? I'll be honest and say that I'm not sure, and I personally don't feel as invested in an answer because as someone who's not Christian, justifying Jesus's more challenging actions is not the most important exercise to me in my spiritual journey.

Amy-Jill Levine suggests that what is happening in this Christian Testament story is that Jesus is protesting, not the temple, not the money changers, but rather the attitude of the people who are coming to it, or at least some of them. The approach of some to worship as an opportunity to show off new clothes rather than recommit to clothing the naked. Deep examination of Christian narratives and texts is necessary to understand the ways that antisemitism, racism, misogyny, and other forms of hatred have become normalized in them and change the ways we understand and invoke them. I hope that this discussion of this passage has provided food for thought and will inspire more reading and exploration. Thank you.

Speaker 3:

Please rise, embody your spirit for prayer. Dear God, thank you for challenging us in ways expected and unexpected. Thank you for encouraging us to always be learning more and to approach worship with an attitude appropriate for praising you. We pray all this in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray. Our father...

Audience:

Who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Speaker 3:

Please join in singing our closing Hymn number 227, Hope of the World.

(Singing)

This transcript was exported on Oct 25, 2023 - view latest version [here](#).

As we leave this place may we remember the unintended consequences of our words. May we always fight for justice and may we apologize when we fall short. Go in peace. Amen.

Audience:

Amen.