

+WEEKLY SERMON

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To a stranger, church must seem baffling!

Matthew 21:23-32

I wonder if you have ever been somewhere and felt out of place and uncomfortable?

I once visited a very posh and ancient golf club. Not being a golfer myself I had no idea what the rules of behaviour were. I didn't know there was a strict dress code, hence I was not wearing the correct clothes.

There were separate men's and women's lounges, only I was not sure which was which and, whilst everyone smiled politely at me, no one spoke. I felt really uncomfortable.

It also appeared to me a bit silly, because I could not see how wearing certain clothes, or not being allowed into a particular room, was going to help anyone play a better game of golf.

I often worry our churches can seem like this to newcomers. We know when to stand, what to say and when to be silent. But to a stranger it must seem baffling.

In Jesus' time, the temple was full of rules and regulations about which people could enter each area, and what was expected. People were not allowed to simply pray or worship God, they had to go through various rituals to make themselves 'clean' enough, even to pray.

The chief Priests were the guardians of these rules. They set the standards of behaviour. And in this passage, they were cross with Jesus because He was breaking the rules by associating with people who were seen as sinful and not ritually clean.

People were not allowed into the temple in case they defiled it. Yet here is Jesus, teaching and preaching in the temple to them and the Chief Priests are outraged.

So they challenged Jesus. The Chief Priests believed there was only one person who had the right to come into the temple and take over, and that was the Messiah.

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Of course, the irony of the story is that Jesus was the Messiah, only they could not see it. They were too busy looking and tutting at the band of unrespectable people listening to Jesus.

Had they stopped to listen to Jesus' teaching they might have realised He was the Messiah standing right in front of them.

Today, who are the people we are excluding from our churches because they don't fit in? And are we so concerned with 'doing' church that we forget to 'be' church as Jesus would have us do?

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