

Body of Christ: Honest Service

Mark 11:12-19

We often prize the quality of religious service much as we would a secular show. We easily see the glitz and glitter of faith expression, but may stop there. Is there not more to faith than those expressions that make us feel good? Isn't worship about much more than those things that please eye and ear? Is service to God not about more than emotion, entertainment, and pleasure?

The crowds hailed Jesus in sincerity, but their acclaim was shallow. They wanted Jesus to be king, but on their own terms. The fig tree was full of leaves and barren of fruit. There were many good reasons for it, but Jesus was not content with it! The temple was bustling with people, but it had been transformed until it was unrecognizable as God's house of prayer. Jesus expected more. He was not satisfied with the abundant religious display of the people. He sought a different kind of display—a different kind of service of worship.

Jesus entered the Temple, challenging the major activities there as detracting from honest service to God. If we read these words in context with the curse of the fig tree, we might find that the display of life in the Temple was not producing the fruit for which it was designed. There was much service, bustle, and activity in the Temple, but it was focused on the external elements of buying, selling, and performing all the minutiae of religious service in accordance with a show of proscribed religiosity and legalistic precision. It was void of honest service to God.

Going to the Temple in Jerusalem was a joyous event. It was festive in character, especially in the weeks surrounding the Passover feast. All of Jerusalem was boiling with the influx of some one million pilgrims arriving to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem. These pilgrims would exchange their currency for Temple currency, purchase animals appropriate for sacrifice, and the air would ring with the bustle and activity of a carnival or fair. All this display of life and activity, however, placed God on the sidelines as merchants sought their own profit and people focused more on the prescriptions of legalistic religiosity rather than on honest service to God.

There was nothing inherently wrong with the glitz, glitter, glamour and joy of the festivities. There was nothing wrong with the bustle, excitement, and celebratory spirit in the air. It was simply not what coming to the Temple was all about. In the celebration and bustle, they had lost the meaning and purpose to which the events were to point. Their service, activity, and religious expression had just lost its honest character. Rather than serving and focusing on God, they were focused on themselves.

Have we perhaps fallen into the same trap? Have we perhaps exchanged entertainment for worship, activity for service, or glitter for focus? If we are not careful, we may forget the reason we gather in the Temple. Instead of allowing the Temple to be a place for the nations to find God, we may fall into the trap of pleasing and entertaining ourselves. Jesus calls for honest service to God. Is that really too much to ask?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*

