

## Are you a Swiftie?

**My wife Susan was walking outside our Church with our two grandsons, Harry and Jack; 5-year-old Jack said to his seven-year-old brother Harry, "let us look for Jesus' gravestone?", and so they started looking, she could hear them say, as they looked at the names on the stones, "He's not here, he's not there, he's not here"! And Susan eventually said to them, "You'll not find a gravestone for Jesus, for he's not dead, he's alive, and so he has no grave!" I'm sure she planted another little seed in their minds.**

**Our faith as Christians is built on this foundational principle, Jesus is alive! In fact the Apostle Paul said, 1 Cor 15 v17 "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!"**

**The early Church built the Christian faith on this fact – He is risen. He has conquered death and there is no grave stone for Jesus!**

**We rejoice in this truth, that sin and death has been conquered. Every Easter morning, we sing the inspirational hymn, "Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son, endless is the victory, thou o'er death has won!" These words should be on our lips each morning.**

**Last week you considered the wedding at Cana in Galilee John 2 v1-12 with Chris; an occasion which was heading for disaster, because the wine had run out, and it was humiliation for the family.**

**This story shows of course Jesus' power over nature, but we are told that it is a sign to something even greater. That's what John tells us in 2v11, "This is the first of the signs"**

**John's gospel must be understood in terms of signposts, and we will see this as we progress through the gospel.**

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**Today's reading, John 2 v13 and following, we find Jesus in the midst of controversy; he is challenging the heart of the Jewish belief system, literally turning their tables and confronting the evil of a system that had lost its way.**

**The turning of the tables is another signpost. Jesus was about to turn the Jewish system of sacrifice on its head.**

**Unscrupulous people were abusing the religion of their day, making it into a system of making money.**

**This made Jesus mad!**

**It represented everything that he detested!**

**The common people were being ripped off. The Church of his day, was being used as a money-laundering business; the church that should have been opening the doors of grace to all, became a closed institution, a club, only providing the religious minority who were siding with the hierarchy of the Roman Government in Jerusalem.**

**So Jesus literally turns the tables on them and causes a stink. Yes, it was deliberate. He was making his point. He was giving them another sign of what was to come!**

**Jesus didn't want people to believe in him just because he had power to work miracles; he wanted something much deeper; he wanted people to follow him, and to be people with like passion, for those in need, and those who were shut out from God's grace, and those who had no voice. That's what the Beatitudes are all about – God siding with the poor.**

**Mahatma Gandhi was a practicing Hindu, but Christianity intrigued him. In his reading of the Gospels, Gandhi was impressed by Jesus whom Christians worshiped and followed. He wanted to know more about this Jesus that Christians referred to as “the Christ, the Messiah.”**

**One Sunday morning Gandhi decided that he would visit one of his local Christian churches in Calcutta; Upon seeking entrance to the Church Sanctuary, he was stopped at the door by the ushers.**

**He was told that he was not welcome, nor would he be permitted to attend this particular church, as it was for high-caste Indians and whites only. He was neither high caste, nor was he white; Because of the rejection, Gandhi turned his back on Christianity.**

**Gandhi rejected the Christian faith, never again to consider the claims of Christ. He was turned off by the sin of segregation that was practiced by the church. It was due to this experience that Gandhi later in life declared, “I'd be a Christian, if it were not for the Christians.’**

**Challenging words; this story puts our reading in context this morning.**

**It gives us an insight into why Jesus was so angry and his violent reaction to the church of his time. People were not permitted to experience grace unless they entered into the money-making system which Jesus denounced as “turning his Father's house into a market!”**

**How does this picture of Jesus make us feel this morning?**

**Often, we want to make Jesus into some mild and meek person, but the Jesus of the gospels is not like that; he was dynamic, he was challenging, he put himself out there, and that was why they would eventually crucify him.**

**The reformation of the Roman Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was all about this same principle of Jesus - turning the tables on the powerful. It was one of their own, a Catholic monk called Martin Luther, who opened the door of grace, who turned the tables.**

**Like Jesus, he saw that people were being ripped off by a corrupt system; they were paying a Temple tax called Indulgences; if you gave the church money, you would be awarded salvation. Such a purchase even came with a receipt, or Letter of Indulgence. Eventually, it became possible to secure Indulgences for someone already dead, and so Luther nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg, this was his upturning of the tables, and this was the catalyst of change, and the reformation of the Church of his time, when many came out, and nailed their colours to the mast with Luther, and we are part of this history of the reforming Church.**

**Luther argued that salvation should be free to all by faith alone; it should no longer be necessary to serve penance for the remission of sins, let alone pay for it.**

**The Church of Scotland, should always be reforming, in line with the Word of God.**

**If we are to be true to Jesus and his reformation of his Church, then we must always be asking the question; are our churches today, creating pathways for people to come and experience the grace of God through Jesus?**

**What are the obstacles that we may be placing in the way of ordinary people from experiencing God's love and mercy?**

**Last weekend, over three nights, 200,000 people packed in to Murrayfield to watch the mega pop star Taylor Swift strut her stuff, and sing her songs, and she had the audience in the clutch of her hands. Fans took the singer's encouragement to *Shake It Off* literally, with monitoring stations detecting seismic activity from 6km away. She was creating an earthquake in Edinburgh as her devotees worshipped her.**

**My seven-year-old granddaughter Abbie, said to her gran last Friday, "Gran, are you a Swiftie?" Followers of the pop star Taylor Swift are known as, Swifties.**

**You may be realising that my grandchildren are giving me good illustrations for my sermons.**

**I supposed the same question comes to us, as we consider the claims of Jesus, are we Christian?**

**Are you a follower of Jesus Christ; someone who imitates him, worships him, identifies with him, and someone who has come to trust, that he has opened for us the door of grace, so that we might experience the forgiveness and mercy of God freely?**

**The old hymn says it superbly,**

*Nothing in my hands I bring,*

*Simply to Thy cross I cling;*

*Naked, come to Thee for dress,*

*Helpless, look to Thee for grace:*

*Foul, I to the fountain fly,*

*Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

**Jesus said, "Destroy this Temple and I will rebuild it in three days".**

**We started with the Resurrection, and we will find that John's gospel continually points us to the resurrection. God's grace given freely to this world.**

**For we are his body, the Church, we are people of the Resurrection. Jesus was resurrected and the Temple was indeed destroyed in 70 AD; his Spirit lives on in the hearts of those who follow him.**

**On the 17<sup>th</sup> April 2033, there is an important event that will be honoured by Christians all over the world. It will mark 2000 years, since Jesus was resurrected, and the stone of death was rolled away.**

**God willing, I look forward to celebrating this! But every day is a day to celebrate the Resurrection and that water is turned into wine and that the tables of corruption have been overturned and that we are living in the age of resurrection. There is no grave stone with the name of Jesus on it!**

**In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
Amen.**