

RENEW LENT - THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

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The Courage to Make a Mess

By Holly Gustafson

I've always considered myself to be a peacekeeper, and probably to a fault – I'm typically the first to apologize or acquiesce, and I'm usually fine to go with the flow. Anything to smooth things over, avoid conflict or even minor disagreement, and keep the precious peace.

Jesus was a peacemaker too – we call him the Prince of Peace, after all – but Sunday's Gospel finds Him flipping tables, tossing coins, and driving beasts and people out of the temple with a makeshift whip. Far from the meek and mild Prince of Peace we're used to, and far from the image of Jesus I'd have preferred.

It used to be hard reconciling this image of Christ filled with what the disciples called "zeal," but what looked to me like anger, and even rage. I was uncomfortable with this side of him, this "temper," and would have preferred to ignore it as an awkward blip in his otherwise perfect temperament. Could we not instead go back a verse or two, to the wedding at Cana, where Jesus performs his first miracle and spends time with family and friends, or skip ahead a bit, to hear how God so loved the world...?

But today I read this Gospel after a long, hard year, and the messiness of it all has given me a new perspective, a better understanding, and less aversion towards Christ's decidedly unpeaceful actions in the temple.

With our oldest child moving back home (and bringing along a cat!), we now have a full house of six adults and one teen. Our home, which had seemed just the perfect size when we first moved in fourteen years ago (with four small children who shared bunkbeds and rooms and took up far less space) now feels far too small. It is crowded, with bigger bodies and even bigger adult wills, personalities, and habits that clash and create nearly constant conflict.

"Can't we all just get along?!" I'm tempted to plead, but I know now, after living in the mess of it all for some time, that that's not what family life is meant to be. Certainly it would be much more peaceful if we would all just stay in our corners and avoid each other – and the conflict of relationship – at all cost, but family, relationship, and community demand we wade into the waste every once in a while, and get our hands dirty with the work of leading each other home, to who and where we are called to be.



This is the virtue of accompaniment, a virtue that calls us to walk alongside the other. Sometimes this walk can be peaceful, but mostly, at least from my experience, it's messy and hard. It means being uncomfortable and sitting in and through the disagreement, instead of dimly agreeing for the sake of shallow calm. It means seeking relationship that is often awkward and clumsy, instead of avoiding it for the sake of ease or relief. And sometimes it means speaking truth, in love, that overturns another's comfort, upsets the peace, and challenges the heart. Accompaniment means journeying and loving and praying in relationship with another, but it almost always means making a bit of a mess along the way.

For Your Reflection:

- Are there any areas in my life where I am afraid to make a mess, to be in relationship, to speak the truth? Am I willing to pray for God's guidance and zeal in this area, or am I afraid to see where it will lead me?
- Is there someone in my life that God is calling me into a deeper relationship of accompaniment? What is it about that person that is holding me back? What is it about myself that is holding me back?

For more understanding on the virtue and call of accompaniment, I recommend listening to the archdiocese's Thinking Faith podcast on Accompaniment - [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#), where Deacon Eric and Dr. Brett discuss pastoral accompaniment and what it looks like in the messy reality of real life.