Jesus entered the temple area 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.
Matt 21.12.

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday when Jesus began the last week of his life by riding into Jerusalem on a donkey as a King. We know he came as a king because of the donkey. This was the fulfilment of *Zechariah* 9.9: 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey', (quoted at v5…) The people cried out 'Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord'. They cut down palm branches to spread on the road in front of him. And, as if that were not exciting enough, he then marched into the great Temple in Jerusalem and proceeded to throw out the money changers and overturn their tables. John's Gospel gives us a very dramatic description of all this on p1065, at 2.13-16… What a man Jesus was! There was nothing mamby-pamby about him. He was absolutely furious. Jesus with a whip driving the money changers out is not the Jesus we usually picture, is it? There *are* times when it is right to be angry. We could call it *righteous* anger, I suppose. There are times when we need to speak out against injustices and abuses with as much force as we can muster. Christians don't need to be wimps. William I of Orange in the 16thC was known as William 'the Silent', because when the Kings of France and Spain told him that they planned to kill Protestants in the Netherlands, he said nothing. As *Eccles* 3 says: 'There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.'

It's Jesus' overturning the tables of the money-changers that I would like to us to think about this Palm Sunday. How do you judge a good sermon? As the old saying goes, A good

sermon should comfort the afflicted, and it should afflict the comfortable. Certainly that was the effect of Jesus' teaching. His marvellous words brought huge comfort to the afflicted, but he also was not scared to afflict the comfortable. And that is why, of course, so many loved him, and so many hated him. They hated him so much that they stopped at nothing until they finally had him nailed to that Cross that first Good Friday. By throwing out the money changers Jesus not only put an end to the money-making racket of the clergy, but he shewed them up in front of the people. 'My house will be called a house of prayer, but *you* have made it a den of thieves'. There was nothing of 'Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild' here, was there? The gospels record for us that the chief priests and the teachers of the law began looking for a way to kill him. He comforted the afflicted and afflicted the comfortable.

This overturning of the tables of the money-changers seems to typify everything Jesus did. He overturned things. The Christians in Thessalonica were accused of 'turning the whole world upside down' (*Acts* 17.6). The poor, the outcasts like the lepers, women who were at the bottom of the pile were brought centre-stage. The Samaritans and Gentiles whom decent Jews wouldn't even take under their notice were welcomed. Those crushed by sin and guilt, and made to feel that they must never be allowed to forget their past, were given a new beginning. Jesus overturned things for these many people who had been marginalised by the rich and powerful. 'The first shall be last, and the last shall be first', Jesus told them. Some loved him for that, and others seethed with hatred.

They seethed with hatred because he threatened them. Hadn't he come into Jerusalem as a king? And yet what a strange king he was on this comical little donkey! So not only was Jesus coming to replace the existing kings, but he was going to change the whole *idea* of kingship. Instead of being based on force, power, fear, swords, *his* type of kingship would not be of this world. It would be based on humility, service, and sacrificial love.

Jesus came into this world to *change* things. Not everyone liked it. The clergy, Caiaphas the High Priest, Pontius Pilate the Roman governor, the rich and the powerful all had positions to maintain. His kicking out the moneychangers shewed that he wouldn't be silenced. The only thing they could do was to have him executed. Otherwise they would lose their own power. Wasn't that why King Herod thirty-three years earlier had tried to have the baby Jesus killed?

Jesus overturns things. He is still turning people's lives upside down. He turned persecuting, fanatical Saul of Tarsus' life round on that road to Damascus. And he is still doing it. You never know, he might even convert Richard Dawkins one of these days. He certainly changed CS Lewis from virulent atheist to Christian champion. I can shew you terrorists in NI who are now preaching Jesus Christ from our pulpits. Every day ordinary people are still experiencing the living Lord Jesus changing their lives.

I'm not interested in Jesus as just the teacher, Jesus the social worker, Jesus the political worker. I rejoice to see Jesus changing people's lives; Jesus who brings people out

of drug and alcohol addiction, and who frees them from superstition and the occult; Jesus who brings new life to those who once knew only fear, guilt and shame. Jesus is still turning things upside down, and countless people thank God every day for Jesus the life-changer.

But there are very many also who have no reason to rejoice at Jesus overturning their tables. Why did the powerful reject Jesus on that first Good Friday? Why do so many, many people today refuse to listen to him? It isn't because church is boring, the seats hard, the coffee awful, and the hymns tedious. It is because Jesus comes to each of us to be *Lord*, demanding to take control of your life. The words 'Jesus is Lord' is pure music to my ears. I want him to be in charge of my life; but many people are angry and resent that claim. Caiaphas wanted to stay in charge as the High Priest. So did Pontius Pilate, and all the other people of power. So it is today: 'it's my life; I'll do what I want'.

Jesus overturned the tables of the money-changers. He comes to overturn this world's powerstructures; that's why the world doesn't like him. He comes to overturn people's lives. Many resent that, but he always changes our lives for the better. When *he* is Lord; when *he* is in control of our lives, we start to live life properly. He comes to overturn the reign of Satan in this world. At the Cross he turned the sin that put him there upside down. Whereas sin used death to silence him, God took his death as an atoning sacrifice. On Easter Day, he turned death upside down, by changing it from the end into the new beginning in God's eternal nearer presence.