

The Slippery Slope is False

March 4, 2018

After listening to our Gospel today that tells the story of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers, what do you think would make Jesus angry today?

Most often I hear this text used to justify anger: See! Even Jesus got mad.

It's also used in a convenient way to limit the number of fund-raisers that hawk their wares after church. By not really understanding this text and taking it at face value, it's easy to think that exchanging goods or services for money in the vestibule is what Jesus was taking issue with. It couldn't be further from the truth.

The story of Jesus and the moneychangers appears in all four of the Gospels. In the synoptic Gospels, it appears right at the beginning of Holy Week and is one of the things that shows why the authorities were so upset with Jesus. In John, the Gospel that we read today, it's in Chapter 2, and it helps set up the fact that Jesus was in tension with the authorities from the very beginning. John places the cleansing of the temple early to help us begin to get a very serious idea early on about Jesus being the very living, breathing, walking, talking Temple of God in our midst.

Scott Hoezee of Calvin Seminary reads the story of Jesus and the moneychangers this way:

Jesus threw out the moneychangers because their ever-expanding emporium was eclipsing the real meaning of the temple. Maybe the temple had started to look like just any old Jerusalem flea market, and so people were forgetting that to have faith was to believe that God's house is most definitely *not* just any old place. Maybe Jesus wanted to shake people up so they could remember that to have faith is a radical thing that should make us radically different from those who do not have faith. What this is all about is how sharp our spiritual vision is. Do we know what matters in life and what doesn't?

I think it's even simpler than that. It's so clear, when you read our two scriptures together today, the story of Jesus and the moneychangers and the 10 commandments. Jesus' anger in the temple was because of how the temple system was blatantly breaking the first commandment: I am the LORD your God, you shall not have false gods before me. They were turning the exchange of secular money for temple currency for the purpose of being able to then buy the required animals to sacrifice into such an elaborate system that it had eclipsed the whole reason why everyone was there: to have an intimate encounter with God. The rules had become so disfigured, so misconstrued that they were now actually doing the opposite of what they were intended to do.

So, back to my original question. If Jesus' anger with the moneychangers is about rules being so disfigured, laws being warped beyond recognition, people creating a false god, twisting something good, what would make Jesus angry today?

Mass shootings, gun violence, and the way that we have allowed a misinterpretation of the second amendment to be combined with a logical fallacy to justify the blatant disregard for the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every year simply because it is my right to bear arms. Just as with the moneychangers, the rules have become so disfigured, so misconstrued that they are now actually doing the exact opposite of what they were intended to do.

Since the Columbine shooting in 1999, a Washington Post analysis estimates that more than 150,000 children attending at least 170 primary and secondary schools in the United States have experienced a school shooting on their campus. Do you want those numbers again? 150,000 kids, 170 schools. This does not even include the students who've experienced mass shootings at the college level. These horrific, heartbreaking, and family-destroying moments have become normal for a generation.

Jesus would be furious at the way that we have allowed one 17th century sentence to take precedence over life, and logic, and compassion. The way that this has been done has been masterful in its simplicity. A small group of people have gotten the American public to fall for the fallacy of the slippery slope. The fallacy of the slippery slope is that if we allow one small thing to happen, then another larger thing will happen, and then yet another larger thing – and the snowflake will become a snowball, will become an avalanche. One of the first things you learn in any basic logic class is that the slippery slope is illogical. One does not follow the other. We have allowed ourselves to be scammed. The propaganda is that if we allow any sort of gun reforms whatsoever, they're going to come and take all of your guns away.

That is illogical. It's a fallacy. It is not true. If there is any one point that is holding up this ridiculous house of cards that we cannot have common sense gun reform, it is this. And it does not compute.

Out of full disclosure, we have guns at our house. Scott's a hunter. And they are locked, and the ammunition is in a different place than the guns are. And that in no way stops us from advocating for common sense gun reform. It doesn't stop us from advocating for universal background checks, and to raise the age of gun sales, and to close the gun show loophole, and to outlaw bump stocks and large capacity magazines, and to allow the CDC to do research.

Do you know about that one? It's insane. Since 1996, the Centers for Disease Control has not been allowed to collect data, **collect data** on gun violence. Why would someone not allow you to collect data? They don't want you to know the truth. The firearms research ban was introduced by Representative Jay Dickey on behalf of the National Rifle Association after the CDC published a study which concluded that people who kept guns in their homes faced a nearly threefold greater risk of homicide and a nearly fivefold greater risk of suicide. Since then, the so-called Dickey Amendment has brought federal funding of firearms research to a halt.

Kwame Anthony Appiah writes the Ethicist column in The New York Times. He wrote a book about 10 years ago called *The Honor Code*. In it, he studies how social transformation happens. He looked at how dueling stopped being the way that British aristocrats solved disputes and how it is that China stopped binding little girls' feet. He concludes that social transformation happens when our narrative of what is honorable changes. For too long we have allowed our country's narrative to be, 'They will have to pry it out of my cold, dead hands.' And that has been at the expense of thousands of lives.

Friends, **the falsehood of guns with absolutely no restrictions being the highest good** has to be exposed for what it is: a bald-faced lie. We have allowed the moneychangers to rule the day and we can no longer allow that to happen. The Constitution is beautiful, I love the Bill of Rights, and the Second Amendment is not my God. And as your pastor, I pray that it's not yours and that you will work with the brave men and women and CHILDREN across this great nation to make it serve us, and not the other way around. May it be so.

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John 2:13-22, Exodus 20:1-17
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