

Faith and Fibonacci

Third Sunday of Lent, 3rd March 2024 – Holy Communion at 8.30am

Reading [John 2.13-22](#)

Above the altar is a [new work of art](#), by Sophie Hacker, which will be dedicated at the 11 o'clock service today. It is part-inspired by the [Fibonacci sequence](#).

[Leonardo Fibonacci](#) was an Italian mathematician in the middle ages. In his *Book of Calculation*, written in 1202, he introduced to Europe the sequence of numbers that is named after him, in which each number is the sum of the previous two numbers.

But it's not just a numbers game, it's almost mystical, a sequence that underlies shapes and patterns that you can find everywhere in earth and heaven, from a sunflower to the solar system.

So whenever we come into church now, this image will remind us that we are involved in something that brings together earth and heaven – which on a chilly Sunday morning you can lose sight of.

This morning's gospel reading shows some people who seem to have lost sight of that. It's often called 'Christ cleansing the Temple', and it too has inspired works of art. But what is it in the Temple that needs cleaning up?

The money-changers and their colleagues selling animals are providing a service for the worshippers, who need special coinage to pay their Temple tax and animals for sacrificing (which seems so alien to us but was standard stuff across the ancient world). There is no suggestion that they are ripping pilgrims off. So what's the problem?

'Stop making my father's house a market-place!' says Jesus, but I don't think this is exactly a protest against commercialising religion. I hear him here saying something like this.

Look! The Temple is where God's glory dwells. It's the place that brings together earth and heaven, where mystical, wonderful experiences might happen. But for you it's just business. Have you forgotten what is going on here deep down, what this is all *for*?

Like the Temple in Jerusalem, this is a place of religious busyness. For this morning's service to happen, people have cleaned the church, produced activity sheets, printed notices, laid out stuff for Holy Communion, welcomed worshippers and written a sermon. And Sean is at the back as I speak, getting after-service refreshments ready.

Thanks to everyone who helps to provide this service for us – but it comes with a risk. The risk is that all this becomes an end in itself; that the Lord comes to his temple – that is, comes to us – and we don't notice, and the religious business just carries on. The risk is that we forget what all this is for.

Our purpose here is not to further a fascinating hobby, but to be a place and a people in which earth and heaven come together, where mystical, wonderful experiences might come upon us.

And if that happens, and God does become real to you or me, it is not simply to make us feel warm and fuzzy inside. It is to enlist us in God's task of enriching and changing the world. That seems worth repeating after the week we have just had, and on the weekend after Alexei Navalny's funeral.

Back to our work of art. When you look, what direction are things moving in? Is it like a catherine wheel, throwing energy and light outwards? Or like a bright vortex, drawing everything into itself; consuming it, even?

When Jesus threw the traders out of the Temple, John's gospel says the disciples remembered a text in their holy writings (our Old Testament), 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'

Our new image can remind us that perhaps none of us can in the end avoid being consumed by something. We have some choice, though, in what that consuming thing shall be. It can be 'business', any stuff that becomes an end in itself. Or it can be the stuff that leads to God, who is the end of everything.