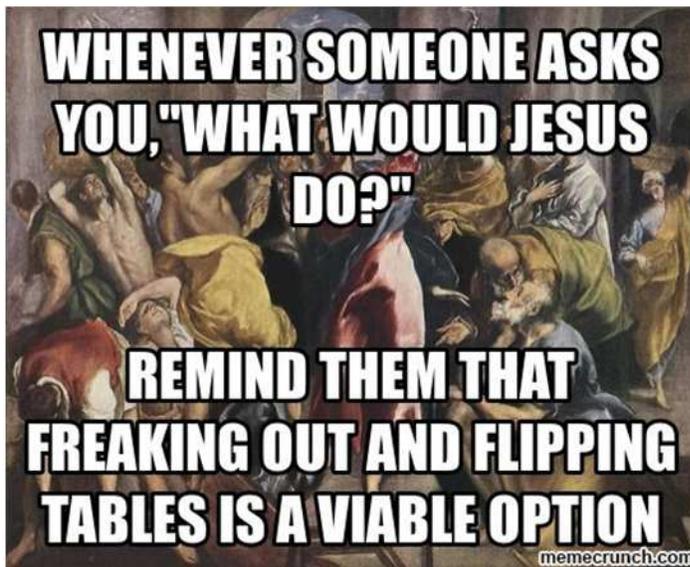


## Start flipping!

Reflection Nov. 25, 2018. Scripture passage: Jeremiah 1:4-10 and 7:1-11

There's this great meme that's been going around for a while on Facebook. For those of you who are not into that kind of thing: a "meme" is a humorous image or a short fun video that someone posts on social media which strikes a chord with a lot of people for some reason and who then start to share it on *their* social media platforms.

The one I'm talking about is a picture of Jesus turning over tables in the temple; you know the scene, right? Jesus makes a whip out of chords, goes into the temple and starts flipping over the tables of the money changers and the dealers who were notorious for swindling honest people of faith and pilgrims.



Anyway, there's a meme of that scene going around; here it is on the screen. And the caption is, "When someone ever asks you 'What would Jesus do?' Remind them that freaking out and flipping tables is a viable option."

I love it, I think it's hilarious. My non-Christian friends also like it a lot. Sometimes you've got to be able to laugh at yourself, right?

And do you remember what Jesus says as he's flipping over the tables and freaking out (although he more

likely yelled it)? In all four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John Jesus says, "You've turned by father's house into a den of thieves..." What he yells there is a direct quote from the prophet Jeremiah in that difficult passage we just heard this morning. And for what we know of Jeremiah, he may well have been yelling and screaming those words, too. And some 600 years later, Jesus yelled them again.

So how about us, 2000 years after Jesus? Do Jeremiah's ancient words affect us just as much as they affected Jesus?

We don't really like to think of God as having the ability to "destroy and overthrow", as Jeremiah prophesied, or at least we don't like to think of God *acting* on it; maybe occasionally threatening it, but not actually following through with it, right? And then there's this bit in the end that sounds so ominous, "I see all the evil that's going on". Yikes! God is watching... watching us, right now...!

But if I'm painfully honest with myself and God (which frankly I'm not often enough), I have to admit that sometimes my heart needs to be upset and shook up a bit. Sometimes I need it flipped and overthrown.

And sometimes, especially those times when I'm not so sure if God is even on the scene in the world, I need to be reminded that God *is* watching, present and active, right here and now. That's not intimidating – that's reassuring and crucial to know.

Things that flip my heart are the complete trust and laughter (and sometimes wisdom) that the children freely give during our Time With All Ages.

By the panhandler who looks me in the eye and blesses me for the change I just dropped in her cup. By a strain of beautiful music that ignites a powerful sense of joy, be it Bach or The Beatles (right, Ray?). By the baptism of a child and the promises the parents make to the child and us and God...

All those things flip my heart. My heart that often likes to pretend that it's more in control than it really is. My heart that, if I let it, will turn toward the cynical, or toward fear, or that keeps me up at night with anxiety because there's so much on my to-do-list, it's overwhelming.

Everything seems to be in upheaval these days: lives and jobs and relationships are being destroyed and overthrown about everywhere you look. This month alone I talked to three or four people who basically said they were ready for 2018 to be over. Sometimes that's just the truth.

Sometimes we wake up in the morning and you hear the news and you feel like crawling right back into bed and stay there until tomorrow when the news can't be as bad as what you just heard. Anyone ever has that kind of mornings?

Those mornings are less about God flipping my heart, and more about me wanting to flip off the world; the pervasive cruelty and sadness and hurt and loneliness and...well, you know. It can get too much, and you feel like yelling at God, "Are you really watching all this, God?! Are you paying *any* attention?!"

Three weeks ago I was on my way back from Holland visiting my ailing mother. Now, a transcontinental flight is no picnic at the best of times, and I tell you this wasn't the best of times. A screaming baby behind me for 8 hours straight. Plane got delayed, so I missed my connection from Newark to Halifax.

I endured rude and downright nasty US border guards and security officers.

I got re-booked for the next flight, 7 hours later – and it got cancelled because of bad weather. No worries, we'll re-route you to Boston, lots of flights going to Halifax from there. Well, not if Halifax suddenly shuts down because a Jumbo jet decides to overshoot the runway. I had had no sleep for 50 hours, no decent meals, I was tired, upset, peed off – and I remember thinking, "Well, if there actually is a hell, this is it; and I haven't done anything to deserve this."

But that's my hard-heart talking. That's a heart that needs to be flipped, badly. When my heart is like the money-changer table, exchanging the beauty and the breath of life for cynicism and self-pity, and the crazy notion that I'm doing this life-thing all alone, without God or any of you...

Really my heart needed to be flipped on that awful return trip: flipped to compassion for the stressed out mom behind me, holding that crying baby. For that young anxious fellow-traveller who missed a very important meeting. For the US border security guards who probably hate their jobs. For the pilots of that jumbo jet who overshot the runway.

Flipped in thanksgiving, that there hadn't been any casualties. Flipped to Christ-like peace for that young man to not worry about his important meeting that he missed.

Flipped in thanksgiving for that Boston airport cleaning lady who showed me where to get some decent coffee at 6 AM. She was skinny and had a limp and thick glasses, but she was patient and had the most beautiful smile; and I didn't really notice.

Life is full of wrestling with joy and sadness, with hope and despair. Ask Jeremiah, they don't call him the weeping prophet for nothing. Ask Jesus, who wrestled with demons and money-changers, with Pharisees and Romans. Yet somehow they made it through, because they knew God was with them and knew them intimately. Their lives were far from peaceful, but they had this deep peace that only God can give.

But they were the big shots, right? I mean, who can touch Jeremiah or Jesus? They were miracle workers, they were bigger than life – and death. That's not *me*...

Now I'm a big fan of reserving the right to let God be God... if God can work through some of the folks I've seen God work through, anyone is game, including me; and *anything* is game, including a church without a church – especially a church without a church. We can do miracles despite ourselves.

But sometimes there are roadblocks to God working through us. Those road blocks are... us. It's just true; I know it's true about me. That's who Jeremiah was preaching to (or yelling at): people whose hearts weren't in it anymore: into life, into God's work in the world, into community. People who were convinced that they could do whatever they want because hey, who cares in this you-snooze-you-loose kind of competitive world? He was preaching a hard word to people whose hearts had become hard as well.

That's what I usually find as being my roadblocks, too. My apathy toward my neighbour. My self-pity for being stuck at an airport. My fears for where this world is headed. Even my inability sometimes to recognize my own faults, which is exactly what Jeremiah is harping on at the end of the passage...

This is not about personal morality and fear of a God who is watching you. This is about living fully into the way that God asks us to be together, just like Jesus taught and showed us.

My apathy must be flipped into concern. My fear must be flipped into trust. And if I'm really going to accept the forgiveness of God *and* my neighbour, I must learn to

accept that sometimes I just screw it all up – and there’s no reason to hide that from God, myself, or my neighbour... That’s incredibly liberating!

I think that’s something to remember as we lean into Advent, because if there’s a deep truth that we can all hold more closely it’s that the baby who couldn’t find an inn to take him in, has decided that we are to be the manger. It’s through flawed, broken people like us that Christ comes into the world, every single day. And if that doesn’t cause your heart to flip, I don’t know what will.

God is watching! That shouldn’t scare us; it should give us hope! God is watching and carrying us as we carry Christ into the world, the One who flipped everything upside down. It’s confusing and impossible, and it’s going to be OK. Before you were born God knew you, loved you, formed you. And that same God continues to work on you and flip your hearts, and turn the world upside down. Last will be first, weak will be strong, poor will be rich.

So flipping tables, and hearts, and lives, is a totally viable option in church, especially when that church gathers in a former school – turned conservatory – turned sanctuary on Sundays. God loves flipping ordinary daily things into extraordinary things of grace – like this place, like us.

So, “What would Jesus do?” I’d say *that* is what Jesus would do.  
Amen!

## SCRIPTURE READING FOR NOV. 25, 2018

### Jeremiah 1:4-10

The LORD gave me this message:

“I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb.

Before you were born I set you apart  
and appointed you as my prophet to the nations.”

“O Sovereign LORD,” I said, “I can’t speak for you! I’m too young!”

The LORD replied, “Don’t say, ‘I’m too young,’ for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don’t be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken!” Then the LORD reached out and touched my mouth and said,

“Look, I have put my words in your mouth!

Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms.  
Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow.  
Others you must build up and plant.”

### Jeremiah 7:1-11

The LORD gave another message to Jeremiah. He said, “Go to the entrance of the LORD’s Temple, and give this message to the people: ‘O Judah, listen to this message from the LORD! Listen to it, all of you who worship here! This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says:

“‘Even now, if you quit your evil ways, I will let you stay in your own land. But don’t be fooled by those who promise you safety simply because the LORD’s Temple is here. They chant, “The LORD’s Temple is here! The LORD’s Temple is here!” But I will be merciful only if you stop your evil thoughts and deeds and start treating each other with justice; only if you stop exploiting foreigners, orphans, and widows; only if you stop your murdering; and only if you stop harming yourselves by worshipping idols. Then I will let you stay in this land that I gave to your ancestors to keep forever.

“Don’t be fooled into thinking that you will never suffer because the Temple is here. It’s a lie! Do you really think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie, and burn incense to Baal and all those other new gods of yours, and then come here and stand before me in my Temple and chant, “We are safe!”—only to go right back to all those evils again? Don’t you yourselves admit that this Temple, which bears my name, has become a den of thieves? Surely I see all the evil going on there. I, the LORD, have spoken!