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## *The Church as a Holy Marketplace*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**

Talking with parishioners before one of our outdoor services last Sunday, I remarked that I sure look forward to another routine. I don't really know what our next routine will be, in terms of Covid-19 protocols and safety, but I sure am tired of this routine! It's time to move on!

However, our Cathedral of St. Philip did resume a holy routine just this past Saturday, March 6! The Cathedral Farmers Market resumed its service of neighborhood community and holy commerce. We are underway! Please join us every Saturday!

I loved that the opening of the Cathedral Farmers Market occurred on the Saturday right before the Third Sunday of Lent, when our gospel for the day was about Jesus overturning the moneychangers' tables, driving out cattle and sheep, and saying, "Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" (John 2:16).

What? Does our Cathedral Farmers Market somehow contradict what Jesus was saying? Quite simply: No, emphatically not! Our Farmers Market exists to serve the people of God: farmers and artisans of integrity and good will. The practices of the first century temple of Jerusalem, whose tables Jesus overturned, did not.

Here is how it was going down, back in the first century. The faithful people of God, on holy occasions like the Passover, travelled to the temple in order to make sacrifices, to give offerings at the accustomed places, in order to make right their relationship with God. But the stringent priestly holiness codes of the day demanded that such offerings and sacrifices be without blemish or impurity. One had to present an unblemished dove, or sheep, or cow.

Further, the religious authorities of the time had inspector-types who would certify the purity of those offerings. If an offering of one of the faithful did not meet the standard, the pilgrim would be directed to another area of the temple complex where "pre-certified" pure offerings were being sold. One could buy their pure offering there!

However, to make matters more complicated, the money used in the temple was a temple currency, not the Roman coin of the realm, which most ordinary people used. Thus, in order to buy a properly pure offering, the pilgrim first had to visit the currency exchange and get the proper coinage. Obviously, there were transaction fees involved.

The result was that faithful pilgrims were having to pay exploitative amounts to the religious authorities, all in the name of holiness. The point is that the religious authorities were not accepting the regular offering of the people of God! Jesus exhibits a righteous indignation at the practice, and he turns over the moneychangers' tables. He drives out the (certifiably pure!) cattle and sheep.

Jesus is showing something of the accepting grace of God. The God of Jesus is a God who accepts regular offerings, the offerings of ordinary people no matter what condition we are in. God does not need our offering to be pure and perfected before we can offer it! In fact, God needs the regular offerings of faithful people of all sorts and conditions!

The lesson of Jesus in the temple applies to churches these days, too. The church is here to accept our offering, in whatever shape our offering is. None of us—not one of us!—is without blemish or wound or scar. We are what we are, wounded and blemished and imperfect. But God accepts our offerings anyway. And holy

churches—holy temples—accept our offerings in whatever shape they are in. In fact, God doesn't just accept our ordinary offerings; God NEEDS those ordinary offerings.

Our Cathedral, like all good churches, is a place of holy community. Together, we offer and receive, we give and take. We enjoy the gifts of each other here. Sometimes, money is involved, and sometimes it is not. That's okay; money is a kind of stored energy – currency, if you will! Our goal is to use money for good, for others, for God – and not merely for self-interest. In holy community, God is honored and people are honored – all of us.

There are marketplaces that exploit the people of God, and there are marketplaces that accept and serve the people of God. The Cathedral of St. Philip seeks, of course, to be the second sort, a holy marketplace. That's why we include such enterprises as the Cathedral Farmers Market – and the Cathedral Book Store, too! In our every exchange here, something of value is being added to our community. As the economists say it, we are “adding value.” We are adding value to our goods and services, and we are certainly adding value to our holy community. This value we Christians add is beyond measure; it is the wideness of God's mercy. It is the accepting love of God. With our ordinary offerings—pure or impure—whatever we have, we seek to love God and to love neighbor.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Sam Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip