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 World Communion
 Parables of Jesus

All
Matthew 21:23-32

When Jesus entered the **temple**, the **chief priests and the elders** of the people came to him as he was teaching and said, “**By what authority** are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” ²⁴ Jesus said to them, “I will also **ask you one question**; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵ Did the baptism of John come from **heaven**, or was it of **human origin**?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why, then, did you not believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet.” ²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “**Neither will I tell you** by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹ He answered, ‘**I will not,**’ but later he **changed his mind and went**. ³⁰ The father^[e] went to the second and said the same, and he answered, ‘**I go, sir,**’ but he **did not go**. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “**The first.**” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are **going into the kingdom of God ahead** of you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him, and even after you saw it you did not change your minds and believe him.

Today’s parable begins with **an argument, in the Temple**, about the **authority of Jesus**.

This is pretty important, because it is Jesus’ divine authority that gives him such transformative power in people’s lives.

But the chief priests and elders, the religious leaders of the day, **don’t want to acknowledge** his power, or the power of John the Baptist.

So, Jesus **answers their question with a question**—which is typical Jesus!
 When they question Jesus' authority, **He questions theirs**—
 by asking if John the Baptist had authority from **humans or heaven?**

They can't answer it because **it will convict them either way.**
 If they say divine power, why didn't they follow John?
 If they say human power, they are going against all of John's followers.
 So they don't answer him, and Jesus doesn't answer them.

Instead, **Jesus tells a parable—about obedience and authority.**
 The authority of a father over two sons.

Now remember that a parable---is a story that **challenges** our assumptions,
 and opens up **more questions** than answers!
 It's a story that makes us **think.**
 It **reframes** common situations, so that we see things from a **new perspective.**

Parables are NOT entertainment, or a story-monologue.
 This is about **challenging our hearts, our motives.**
 Parables don't just convey meaning, they urge **action.**

This parable is challenging because we are **ALL convicted in it.**
ALL of us.

We've all **refused to follow** God, and sometimes we eventually wake up and do it,
 we change our minds.
 And we've all SAID we will follow God,
 and then **not followed through** with our actions.

The **FIRST SON** refuses to go and work in the vineyard,
 but then changes his mind and goes.
 The **SECOND SON** says he will go, and doesn't actually go.

When Jesus asks what the leaders think,
 they agree that the **first son did the will of his Father---**
 which is **ironic** because these same leaders refused to change their minds about
 following John the Baptist or Jesus.
 They refuse the teachings of both,

so Jesus says that the tax collectors and prostitutes, the very people considered the lowest of the low in God's kingdom, will be going into the kingdom ***ahead of them!***

Can't we find ourselves in this parable--If we're honest?

And don't we all just ***hate it when someone says*** that they will do something for us, and they don't follow through?

Isn't it true that sometimes ***actions speak louder*** than words?

This story of the two sons is kind of like the ***parable that the prophet Nathan*** told King David in 2 Samuel....David had seen this woman named Bathsheba bathing, and taken her as his wife, even though she was a married woman, whose husband worked for David in the army!

Then, David sent her husband Uriah to the front lines so that he would be killed, and she could have David's child.

So Nathan came and told this ***parable to David*** in 2 Samuel 12:

*"There were two men in a certain city, **one rich and the other poor**. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but **one little lamb**. The poor man **loved that lamb**, it was like a child to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and the rich man didn't want to take one of his lambs to prepare for dinner, so he **took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it**. Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the rich man.*

*He said to Nathan, "As the Lord lives, **the rich man deserves to die**; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and had no pity."*

*And Nathan said to David, "**You are the man!**"*

If we allow this story of the two sons to speak to us, ***we too are convicted***.

Because ***we have ALL been one of the two sons***.

And really, although the first son obeyed,

both sons are disrespectful and ***dishonor the Father***.

And yet somehow, both sons, AKA the tax collectors and prostitutes,

The chief priests, and elders—are ***ALL going to enter the kingdom of heaven....***

It's just that the religious leaders, who assume they will be first, will ***actually be last***.

Remember that frequent teaching of Jesus?

the last will be first, and the first will be last?

So often, we are ***the SECOND SON***, right?

We are people who say we'll do it, and ***don't follow through***

There is a **GAP** in our lives—between our ***lip service, and our life service.***

We talk a big talk, but we refuse to walk the walk.

Our words are good---but ***our words LACK ACTION.***

Presbyterians are big on words,

The question is, are we ***backing those words with action?***

Are we allowing what we ***SAY to inform everything that we DO?***

How often do we ***allow ourselves to be the FIRST SON?***

How often do we ***change our minds, and obey*** God?

How often do we ***allow our hearts to be opened,***

and our perspective expanded---changing our actions?

And yet, isn't that the ***point of following Jesus?***

Instead, we ***often say 'NO' to Jesus.***

It is ***RARE that we allow our hearts and minds*** to be changed,

so that we can do what needs to be done.

And yet—that is always possible.

That option is right there, waiting for us.

Jesus is ALWAYS WAITING for us.

No matter how many times we say “No” to Him,

Jesus grants us the ***GRACE to start all*** over again.

It's not about our initial refusal, or our mistakes.

Our past means nothing.

We can ALWAYS start again.

There is always room to grow, to change, to obey.

Isn't that amazing??

The problem is---***we let PRIDE stand in OUR way.***

We let our stubbornness stop us.

Like the chief priests and elders, we think we are right.

I was reading about how human ***minds are changed*** this week.
 And the truth is, most people,
 when confronted with information that challenges our long-held beliefs,
 we simply ***reject the information, and question the authority***
 of the person sharing it!

Does this sound familiar?

Could this be why we are so ***polarized?***

So stuck in different ***tribes—politically? Socially? And in church?***

Let's say we are ***sure about who is in and who is out, in the church.***

And someone comes along and says—

those people on the other side of your fence, ***Jesus welcomes them.***

And you should too.

They are not any different from us.

They are just as beloved.

But we have spent years saying they are ***sinners,***

their ways are wrong, ***they are NOT part of the church.***

What can change someone's heart and mind?

Is it lots of facts, and lots of compelling evidence?

No, usually not.

Usually the facts don't even matter!

It all comes down to ***personal connections.***

To real ***human interaction.***

I've seen this time, and again.

What if that's why ***Jesus was so effective*** at changing hearts and minds?

He ***didn't*** just say hey—welcome everyone and here's why.

Let me ***explain*** about tax collectors and prostitutes.

Let me give you the ***facts*** about God's kingdom.

Instead, he ***touched*** people.

He ***healed*** them.

He ***ate*** with them.

He **welcomed** them---especially those on the other side of the fence.
 The despised tax collectors, colluding with Rome and cheating the Jews.
 The unclean prostitutes, selling their bodies for profit.
 The lepers, making everyone unclean who was in close proximity to them.
 The women, who were just property, presumably without minds of their own.
 Jesus made **human connections**.

Got any people you just don't understand?

Maybe a migrant worker, smuggled into this country?

A transgender person?

A person of the opposite political party?

I wonder, have you tried **meeting** them?

Talking to them?

Eating with them?

Have you tried **welcoming** them?

It's **so much harder to hate or judge---in person**.

Who will we be?

Will we **refuse to accept any new information**?

Will we simply **question the authority** of anyone with new ideas?

What if **JESUS is the one with new ideas**,
 challenging our assumptions and long-held beliefs?

Will we **question HIS authority**?

Or consider what he has to say?

Will we **change our minds and go into the vineyard**?

Or say "**yes, yes, Jesus**" and never actually DO the right thing?

In Matthew 7:21 Jesus says: "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who **DOES the will of my Father in heaven**.*"

And will we **leave room for the FIRST SONS**?

You know all the Nones (nones) and Dones who have left the church?

Isn't there hope for them?

Who knows, maybe their refusal results in a change of heart some day, or maybe some of those people who are not in church are actually already following God, in ways we cannot see or understand?

Who are we to judge?

Connections, Year A, Vol 3. WJK: Louisville, 2020, Pg. 350

Remember the TV personality—Dr. Phil?

Dr. Phil reportedly said that the person he most wants to interview, in all the world, is **Jesus Christ**.

He said, ***“I want to talk to him, I’ve got questions for him.***

I’d like to have a conversation with him about the meaning of life”.

And Pastor Charles Campbell saw that, and thought,

“Oh no you wouldn’t!

You would not want to sit down with Jesus, treat him like an interviewee, and ask him about the meaning of life!

*You would be **crazy** to do that!*

*He would turn you **upside down and inside out.....”***

Charles Campbell, Feasting on the Word, Year A. Vol 4, WJK: Louisville, 2011, pg. 117.

I mean, really, can you imagine?

“Well, Dr. Phil---let me ask YOU something”....says Jesus

Talk about a truly **dangerous** conversation!

Do you really want to talk to Jesus?

the man who **answers every question with a soul-piercing question?**

Because Jesus does that over and over again---

Including right here with the chief priests and elders,

They think they are questioning him—but **Jesus is the questioner!**

And he’s questioning their **priorities**.

He is **unmasking their true motivations**—their power and privilege!

And then he tells a story about how **they will FOLLOW**

the tax collectors and prostitutes into the kingdom of heaven!

Questioning Jesus is **dangerous**.

Following Jesus is **risky**.

But ***listening and doing*** what he teaches—is the ***pathway to LIFE***.
Real life.

And it is the ***pathway to JOY***.

Words and actions that follow Jesus---that brings joy.

A joy that is pretty unexplainable.

Just like the kingdom of heaven.

It's something we just ***have to experience***.

So, let's leave this place, with open hearts and minds.

Let's ***HEAR and BELIEVE and FOLLOW Jesus***.

Let's ***find the LIFE*** that Jesus alone promises to each and every one of us.

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today.

Whether we say the right words and fail to follow through,

Or refuse at first, and obey later,

Whoever we are, wherever we come from, ***we are WELCOME***—

in the ***kingdom*** of God, and today, ***at Christ's TABLE***.

Because God's grace is enough---for us ALL.

And all God's people can say, Amen.