

You Can Envision a Fight or Fight for a Vision

17 Pentecost A – Sept 27, 2020

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Gospel: Matthew 21:23-32

23When 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?” 24Jesus 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. 25Did 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?’ 26But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” 27So 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.

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.’ 29He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. 30The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. 31Which 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 dominion of God ahead of you. 32For 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.”

It is so easy and tempting to build ourselves up at the expense of others. “I can’t imagine ever doing that.” “How can people live like that?” “Who would do such a thing?” At some point we all think or say these sorts of things. Like it or not, we use these words to comfort ourselves at the expense of others. These words are a reminder that all people stand in need of God’s grace.

In the parable of the two sons, Jesus invites us to choose between two sons when neither fully does the will of their father. Here Jesus makes the point that we are all equally in need of God’s grace.

When public officials claim biblical authority for policies that do harm to the most vulnerable among us, how do we respond? Jesus was shrewd in responding to the temple leaders who questioned the authority he claimed in cleansing the temple. Asking direct questions about power (who has it, where does it come from, and how is

it maintained?) is essential in a church that is always reforming, always asking who gets to claim the authority to speak for God. Even at the close of the Sermon on the Mount (7:29), Jesus is said to have preached with authority greater than that of the scribes. In Matthew 21, Jesus has entered Jerusalem in a triumphal procession and has cleansed the temple. After driving the moneychangers out of the temple (21:12), he begins teaching there. This leads narratively to the Jewish religious leaders, who are expected to distinguish true from false prophets, now inquiring about his authority. When Matthew writes, by the year 80, the temple had been destroyed, and the early Christian community is depicted as debating its religious stance with the Jews who were not part of the Christian movement. The fifth section of Matthew (21:1—25:46) includes seven parables. This parable grounds religious authority in following “the will” of God. Recall that both the Lord’s Prayer (6:10) and Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (26:42) ask that God’s will be done. For Matthew, even disreputable persons might have religious authority, if they follow the will of God as revealed in Christ. (sundaysandseasons.com)

Jesus teaches about conflict (informal first then take others with you) – Mt 18

Jesus teaches about forgiveness (7x70) – Mt. 18

Jesus teaches about depth of God’s Forgiveness (Grace based on God’s Generous Choice)– Mt 20

Jesus teaches about God’s Authority and those who express it and live it out - Mt 21

This passage is filled with authority/power dynamics: the Temple leaders interrupt Jesus while he is teaching, they challenge his source and expression of authority, Jesus challenges them with his questions, the leaders refuse to answer for fear of the people, Jesus refuses to answer their challenge, the Father and the 2 sons reveal their expressions of power, following the parable of the two sons Jesus insults the leaders and holds them accountable.

a. When you were young what were you taught (cognitively and emotionally) about power? How to hold it, wield it, use it, protect it? What power dynamics did you watch in your household growing up? How has that shaped who you are as an adult and your exercise of power?

b. If you don’t think you have any power to exercise....what has contributed to your giving it away/not claiming it, not picking up the responsibility for it? You have the

power (given by God) to decide how you will live and who you will be....why is this not seen/claimed/lived out by so many?

c. Some characters are interacting in a way that is deliberately leading toward a fight (an expression of power over another). As if verbal Martial Arts style Jesus moves around this energy and uses it back on his challengers pushing them to see the basis of REAL power and authority.....God's Will. Have you ever been taught how to move in this way around these expressions of power by others?

i. Aspects of Power: Physical, Psychological, Emotional, Relational.....

ii. Staying Calm – Read the signs (ext, internal), Use intuition, Breathe

iii. Role of Denial, Cruelty/Meanness/Nastiness, Biology

iv. Power Struggles; Power Struggles w Prejudice

v. Engagement VS Dis-engagement

vi. Stay focused on the Vision (God's Will) – is the "Move" to make

1. Absorb the hit; DO NOT RETALIATE

2. Stay centered in your brain, not your guts

3. Look for commonalities, common interests

4. Work on what you can; they work on their stuff

5. Speak/Define/Express the vision; how it feels, etc

6. Take the energy to fight and push it into energy toward the vision.