**10/1/23**

**Answering a Question with a Question**

**Matthew 21:23-32**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:2 NRSV) (2) **Amen.**

Good morning to each and every one of you in the pews here, those of you at home, and those of you out and about on the conference call. We are glad that you have joined us today!

I come to you this morning and admit that I have made this Sermon way too complicated. I have typed and reviewed it several times. I have tried to add all the research and perspectives of others. However, in that process I actually lost my focus. While I was driving here this morning I realized that, and I came to grips with the fact that it really did not need to be that complicated. Now, you may be sitting there and thinking Vince has finally lost it. We have told him to slow down, and we have told him to stop burning the proverbial candle at both ends. Well, I am here to admit that I have lost it a bit, and in losing it I have also found it. So, here goes nothing here this morning.

I admit that I have been reading so much that I have questioned what I am even reading, and what the actual point is. I have read so much that I needed to admit that I was confused so I could get back on track. I am reading a lot for seminary each week, and I am reading a lot to study and be able to write and present a sermon each Sunday, and for other special services too. It can be rather overwhelming to be honest. Confusing and frustrating do not always seem to summarize it best either. I admittedly try my best to keep all the concepts and thoughts separate, but my brain for some reason does not always allow me to do that. Sometimes everything gets all jumbled together. I would like to say that is for good reason, but I honestly do not think it is. When I am up here I do not want to confuse you, and I do not want to confuse myself anymore either. So, as we start things out here this morning and explore our Gospel Reading together, we are going to admittedly slow down to speed up sometimes. We are going to learn and review things together, and we are going to explore why Jesus happens to often be answering a question with a question.

We are also reminded that, “The Spirit moves in our life and nudges us toward faithful obedience. He wants us to realize that being a disciple of Jesus Christ is more than praying a sinner's prayer, or proclaiming our faith in the words of the Apostles' or Nicene Creeds. Discipleship is more than simply saying, "Yes." It is backing up our words with steps of faith. Discipleship is following Jesus wherever he leads us, trusting that he wants the very best for us. Being a follower of Jesus Christ means getting out of our comfort zone and that being safely in the arms of Jesus is more important than the safety and security that the world attempts to provide. Discipleship involves struggle and doubt--but also eventually action.” (3) That is something the chief priests and elders all too often lost sight of at times. That is something the sons in our Gospel Reading today also lost sight of. We are all indeed human, and that is why it ever more important to review and refocus our minds on Christ and his teaching.

Today we start out with Jesus in the temple teaching. Nothing seems to be wrong with that, correct? Isn’t that what we and everyone else would come to expect of him? It is very similar to all of us coming to our worship service each and every Sunday. Teaching is what he did, and learning is what we do. We are here to learn and hear the Word of God. To slow things down a little bit and make us realize that our actions are not for granted, and we are not just here in some continued weekly effort that means absolutely nothing. We are not just going through the phases, and not just coming to worship without thought and commitment.

In the first part of our Gospel Reading today “Jesus answers the question of the religious leaders with a question of his own. In answering it the religious leaders would either convict themselves as hypocrites, or lose the favor of the crowds. They refuse to answer.” (3) The religious leaders “… had achieved an elite position for themselves with influence throughout the culture. They had no intention of giving up that influence. But, to maintain their position, they needed to embarrass Jesus, or at least catch him in some sort of error. They challenged His authority hoping He would slip up. But, instead of putting down Jesus’ power, they received a lesson in how to act.” (4) The religious leaders for some reason did not really realize who or what they were dealing with. They were so blinded by their position, or what they felt was right, to be able to even slow down and consider that something different could be correct as well. That, or they simply knew what was right, but they could not come to abandon the way and the thought process of life and the group they were part of. The “chief priests and elders of the Temple did not realize that they were also in need of repentance and God’s forgiveness. They enveloped a sense of arrogance as they considered themselves to be believers and servants of God, but failed to see the redeeming grace of God at work through John the Baptist’s ministry.” (5) Let us not act so blindly, let us not act like the rest of the group, let us act as the Lord has called us to and manage to do what is right and sound despite what others may think or feel. We are guided by Christ, and we are called to be more and more like him.

Then, in the second part of our Gospel Reading today we get two sons that are asked by their father to go out and work in the vineyard. Both provide different responses and different actions. Jesus also speaks to us. “Sometimes we are the first brother, knowing all the right answers, hanging out with the right people in the right place but forgetting what Jesus has asked us to be about. We forget that we are to go to others with the good news that Jesus has come to restore our relationship to others. We forget that our real work is outside of these walls. We say the right words but forget to allow them to change our lives. Sometimes we are the second brother. We may have made poor choices in our lives, we have ignored what Jesus asks us to do. We might feel as though we do not deserve anything from God, let alone the right to ask. Yet, sometimes we turn back to God asking forgiveness even if we do not believe we can rise above our past. It is to us, as the second brother, that Jesus speaks telling us to not let the past destroy us, it is far more important how we respond today. To do the will of the Father is to watch for ways in which we are the first brother, classifying others as belonging or not belonging, saying the right words but not matching them with action.” (6)

We also cannot miss this very important point and occurrence in our Gospel Reading today. “Jesus was also talking to the tax collectors, prostitutes and other sinners who hungered for all his words, his healing, grace and love. Here were a lot of people who hadn’t lived lives anywhere near what we might call “righteous”. They were the outcast, the scum of society and they knew it. They had made a lot of bad choices in their lives, but they heard the words of Jesus and wanted to turn their lives around. They were not to be bound by their past, what mattered was that they had decided, now, to follow Jesus. Jesus’ words of grace and hope to them in this story were that they need not be bound by the past, forgiveness was theirs and more than that, they were invited to live in the kingdom of God. They were restored to a relationship with God, that which they craved so dearly. That which they saw in the life of Jesus.” (6)

We can choose to make today’s message very complicated. We can explore it from so many different perspectives that we muddy the water. The message in our Gospel Reading is pretty clear. Jesus answers a question with a question to get us to slow down and focus. He wants to take us out of our normal daily path and functions to get us to recognize what we may be doing wrong, and that we may need to change course. We learn from both of these sons. One says no, but goes later when he realizes he needs to do the will of the Father. The second says yes, and never even goes. So, I ask, which son do you want to be? Which son do I want to be? I would venture we all come to the same conclusion and the same answer. We want to be the son that admits his wrongdoing, repents, and goes forth to work in the vineyard. The son that goes to work out in the very world that we are indeed called to work. Can we admit that we are wrong?

Amen.

**References**

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 Preaching

 Year A 2023

 October 1st, 2023

 18th Sunday After Pentecost

(2) Bible.com

(3) SermonCentral.com

 Authority Issues Series

 Contributed by Kevin Ruffcorn on Oct 9, 2011

 Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

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(4) SermonCentral.com

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 19 Pentecost A

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 Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

 Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 21:23-32**

 After driving the moneychangers out of the temple (21:12), Jesus begins teaching

 there. His authority is questioned by the religious leaders, who are supposed to

 be in charge of the temple.

 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 kingdom 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.”