

October 1, 2017

Will You Go and Work, or Not

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee, O Lord our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

SERMON

The time that Jesus walked in Israel was not a quiet time in Israel. The Romans had occupied the country. They exercised rule over it. They taxed the people. So, it was a difficult time when you are the chosen people of God and yet your country is not your own. This is the situation that Jesus found himself in. It's the same situation that John found himself in. And John came on the scene to proclaim repentance. Repent, return to the Lord. It is clear that we are not what we should be.

That this appears to be punishment from God for not being the people that we were chosen to be. That we have not followed God the way that we should have. And there were many people who came to John. Who heard his message, who saw him in the same light as the prophets of old who stepped into the Jordan River to be baptized, to be washed from their sins. And to come out on the other side with the intention of living life differently. Living life better in accordance with God's will and in accordance with God's law.

Jesus proclaims much the same proclamation. And yet he doesn't go out into the wilderness like John to call the people out. He goes to the different towns and he teaches about the kingdom of God. And many hear his teachings, see what he is about. Witnesses the miracles that are being performed. They believe and they follow. But there is a substantial number of people from the different groups. The Chief Priest, the Elders of the People, many of the Pharisees, some of the Sadducees that don't accept his message as God's truth. They turn away.

In the Gospel reading for this morning, Jesus goes into the temple. The very center of the faith of the Jews. That place where they perform their sacrifices, that place where they draw near to God and the holy of Holies. The center of the temple, to be close to God, to pray to God. And Jesus is in one of their courtyards and he's teaching the people who will come and listen about the kingdom of God has drawn near. You are being called to something new, something exciting.

You are invited to be a part of God's kingdom here and now with the promise of entering into the fulness of God's kingdom later. This does not please the Chief Priest and the Elders of the People. And so, they come to confront him. And they come with the intention of asking a question that challenges Jesus, "By what authority are you doing these things?" They're hoping it's a question that no matter how he answers, they will be able to refute him. If it's from God, well what proof do you have that it's from God. It's obviously not from the Chief Priest.

He has no authority from them. No authority from the Pharisees who don't believe that he and his disciples are following the law correctly. Not from the Sadducees, probably not even from the Assyrian's who John may have been a part of. The group that was calling for a strict adherence to the teachings of Moses. But also, a prophetic voice of repentance. Because the Messiah is coming or has come on the scene.

What authority does Jesus have other than himself, is the question? Jesus chooses a debate forum where he says, "Okay, I'll answer your question if you answer one question for me. The baptism of John, was it from Heaven or was it an origin of man?" Well that throws them off.

Obviously most of them, all of the them, the High Priest, these Elders of the People did not accept the call of repentance to God. They didn't go out there. They did not want to participate. They thought that this was a crazy man. He was in the wilderness. He was wearing camel hair shirt. He was eating wild honey and locust. He wasn't dressed in fine robes. He wasn't seen as a Chief Priest. He wasn't seen as an Elder of the People. And yet a lot of people seeing the situation and the world around them, believe that his call was like that of the prophets of Old and then it came from God.

They were baptized and they intended to live their life differently. The Chief Priest and the Elders of the People had not done it. So, they don't want to say it's from God because

then why didn't you go out and hear and heed and join in the call for repentance for our country.

Now if it's simply from an origin of man than what's going on there. The people believe it's from God. They don't want to lose face. So rather than answer they simply say, "Well, we don't know. We're not convinced one way or another." And Jesus says, "Okay, I'm not going to bother to answer your question either."

But here's something else for you. What do you think? Man has two sons. He says to the first son, "Go out into the vineyard do what you should do as part of this family. Go and tend to the vineyard; labor in the vineyard. The first son is kind of a rebellious son. "Nope not going to do it. Don't want to, don't like working in the vineyard not going go." And after he thinks about it a little later in the day. It's what you do as part of the family, it's part of what we are. Goes to the second son. "Son, go and work in to the vineyard." And he says to his father, "I go sir I'll take care of my responsibility. I will do what is expected of me to go out and work in the family vineyard." But he doesn't go.

Now Chief Priest and Elders, which one did the will of his father? First, right? He's the one that actually carried through. He was actually the one even though he said no at first. He thought better of it and went out and did what he was supposed to do. And Jesus says got you. Got you right there.

So, the tax collectors and the prostitutes will go into the kingdom of God ahead of you. That threw them. What are you talking about? Don't you see, that you have said to God I will follow you, I will follow your law. I will do what is expected of me. Chief Priest, Elders of the People, I will do what is instructed of me.

The tax collectors and the prostitutes they recognize when John came on the scene and called for repentance, that they had said no to God. I'm not going to go, I'm not going to fulfill what you want of me of who I am as a Jew. As the chosen people of God. I'm not going to do it. I'm going to go my own way. I'm going to make money as a tax collector. I'm going to live an immoral life as a prostitute until they heard the call from John.

They heard the call to repentance, they heard that call to come back. And they chose to follow that. They began to fulfill what they were supposed to do as God's people. They turned around. You chief priest and Elders of the People, you said yes to God, you claim to be doing God's will and yet you don't take care of the poor, you don't take care of the people. You don't love God first. You don't love your neighbor as yourself. You like your position of power. You are not following through on what you are called to do in your life as a follower of God, as God's chosen people.

And therefore; these sinner's notorious sinners who repent, to hear Gods call to them. Who repent, who hear my teaching about the kingdom of God of Heaven who respond to that.

Who begin to live their life according to that truth? They will go into the kingdom of Heaven ahead of you. It doesn't say that they won't go, eventually. But they are already hearing the good news. They are already responding to the good news. They're starting to live differently. And you are stuck in your old ways. You say yes to God but you don't live it out.

What an important parable for us to hear. We've all said yes to God in our baptismal covenant, we've said yes to God. We said I believe that Jesus is the son of God. I believe and therefore am in covenant with God. As God has accepted me as son and accepted you as son or daughter then promises are made. It might sound familiar.

When our bishop is here on the 29th and right now we have 12 people that are planning to be confirmed on that day. On that day, no matter which service you come to the confirmation will be at that 10:30 service. Whichever service you come to the bishop always has a reaffirmation of the baptismal covenant as part of the service when he's here. And he'll be asking you these questions.

It's like the father saying go into the vineyard. Will you continue in the Apostle's teaching and fellowship? In the breaking of bread and in the prayers? Will you come together and recognize God in your daily prayers? Will you worship God as the one who gives, redeems, and sustains life? Will you do these things? It's not a statement of belief. Will you do? Will you continue? Will you persevere in resisting evil? Recognizing

that evil is real in the world. And it comes and touches every person's life at one point or another. Will you persevere at resisting evil and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord? Recognize that it is part of us.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God and Christ? Share with others who you are and whose you are and why you are God's child. So, that they too might hear and know that they are called to something more, called to something special in the world. To be a part of God's kingdom that came and touched the world in that first century and continues to be alive in the world today.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons loving your neighbor as yourself? Seeing Christ in every person, not just the ones that believe like I do. Look like I do. Come from where I come from. Talk like I talk. All persons. Loving them, caring about their welfare. About how their life is being lived as well as our own.

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people? All people. And respect the dignity of every human being. What a monumental task. To respect the dignity of every human being. They have a right to live. They have a right to mercy and justice. They have a right to hear the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They have the right. We are children whose Father has come to us and said to us; as my children go into the vineyard.

Last week we heard that there's plenty of harvest but the laborers are few. As God's children, we are part of the laborers. We are called to go out. Go into the vineyard today. By ascending to the baptismal covenant and answering these questions you have said, "Yes Father I will." The question is will you go and work or not?

Father Gregory Hein