

October 1, 2023 on the Gospel Matthew 21:23-32

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.

Wife: "Would you like dinner?" Husband: "What are my choices?" Wife: "Yes or No."

Multiple choice question. Where does a fish swim? A. B. or C.

As an inspiration, the pastor (before leaving for Ghana) gave me an old sermon of his on this gospel from 2002 as an inspiration. However, it took me 40 minutes to read out loud and so I decided to write a shorter sermon for today. Pastor Dyck managed to finish his sermon before noon three Sundays in a row, including communion. I'll try to keep the streak going since I've heard that there is a fine line between a long sermon and a hostage situation.

In the temporary absence of the pastor, Julie Kuwabara has been supporting us by writing out and printing our bulletin each week. Thank you, Julie. Last week Julie asked me what to put in the bulletin as the title of the sermon. At the time, I responded the gospel themes

spoke about “authority and obedience”. While that may be the most obvious theme of this gospel, after talking through it with Brian, I decided that a more appropriate title would be “choice and obedience.” Today’s gospel begins with us back in the temple, where the chief priests and the elders were the authorities in their community. This new kid on the block, named Jesus, was preaching the message of the kingdom of God. Among these teachings was doubtless the message from 1 Corinthians 13:13 about the kingdom of Heaven being at hand and about how our words and actions must be guided by faith, hope, and love, with love being the greatest. Jesus and his message left these men of authority feeling that their power was threatened. It only stands to reason that they would challenge him to try and take him down a peg by questioning where *his* authority came from. Jesus *had* an easy answer. “I thought you guys were scholars. I’m the son of God, you twits.” But rather than answering directly, Jesus chose to turn the tables on them by asking them a question designed to make them reflect. He asked the following: “Did the baptism of John come from Heaven or was it of human origin?” Being scholars, they analyzed the impact of each possible answer. If John’s baptism was from Heaven, they had no grounds to

question where Jesus' authority came from since John had acknowledged Jesus as the Lamb of God. John the Baptist who preached repentance also recognized that someone greater would come after him. He said in John 1:29 – Look the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. The elders and priests continued to deliberate in that if they said John's baptism was of Earthly origin, then they would be challenged by all their temple followers who believed that John was a prophet. This put them into a bind and so they chose to sit on the fence and respond with a non-answer: "We don't know." Jesus then drove his lesson home to them by refusing to answer their question about his authority.

Since Jesus always tried to teach his lessons from a place of love, he chose not to call them out for their hypocrisy. Instead, he chose to offer a solution in the parable about two sons given the task of working in the vineyard by their father. In last week's sermon, we heard about workers in the vineyard contributing what they could, and all being valued equally by the owner. In today's gospel, one son gives his dad some attitude but ultimately chooses to do as he was asked. The second son agrees to do as he was asked but chose not to carry through on his promise. Jesus asked, "Which of the two

did the will of his father?” Simply put, which of the two was obedient?

They priests and elders chose the right answer that it was the first son who was obedient. This gave Jesus the opportunity to pursue further reflection by comparing the learned scholars who put themselves and their tenets above Jesus while the tax collectors and prostitutes chose to believe and follow John the Baptist and then Jesus the Lamb of God.

God wants us to be able to choose – and choose wisely – along life’s journey. Jesus’ teachings in the temple were intended to build on the message from John about repentance and preach the good news of the free gift of the Kingdom of God to all. They were also intended to offer a good foundation for choice. That foundation being the word of God as preached by his begotten son: John 14:6 “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” To choose well and to be truly obedient, we must freely have “the same mind as was in Christ Jesus.” A mind filled with humility, obedience, love, and sacrifice.

Good choices, based on a solid foundation of love and humility, will express our obedience to the positive message in this song:

Verse 1:

C G Am Em

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

Dm7 C G G7

And his righteousness,

C G Am Em

And all these things will be added unto you.

Dm7 C G C

Allelu, Alleluia.

Amen.