

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: Matthew 21:23-32

“When he 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?’ 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. 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?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for all regard John as a prophet.’ 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.

“‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ He answered, ‘I will not,’ but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same, and he answered, ‘I go, sir,’ but he did not go. 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. 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.”

I was recently reminded of the old story of the man who had nine cats. One day his friend was visiting him and noticed that he had nine separate little kitty doors cut into the wall. He was puzzled by this and asked why the cats couldn't all use the same door.

The man replied, "When I say scat, I mean scat!"

I find this story amusing because cats don't listen very well. I know. I have one. His name is Marvin. When I tell Marvin to do something, he usually just looks at me as if to say, "Who made you my boss? You can go ahead and think you're my boss; but I will do what I want." Over the years, I had many cats, and they all had the same attitude to various degrees.

Today's scripture is all about authority. The scripture tells us that Jesus was in the Temple teaching when he was approached by the chief priests and the elders. Wherever Jesus spoke, people would listen; which did not make the chief priests and elders all that happy. They were the ones appointed to teach, and Jesus was encroaching upon their power. And Jesus' teachings sometimes rubbed against the teachings the people had been taught. So, these men who approached him on that particular day, asked him in front of everyone gathered around, "By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?"

Instead of giving them a direct answer, he asked them to answer a question for him first. If they answered his question, he would then answer their question. The question Jesus asked really isn't relevant to the point of this story except that, the chief priests and elders knew that they could not answer Jesus' question in front of those gathered around. They knew Jesus had them because no matter how they answered Jesus' question, they were going to upset people. So, they pleaded ignorance to Jesus' question; which meant then that Jesus did not answer their question.

We might wonder why Jesus didn't answer their question. Some theologians believe it is because if he had told them his authority came from the fact that he was the Son of God, it would

have hastened the end of his ministry. There still was more to do and more to teach. The time was not right, yet.

Then Jesus decides to tell a parable to address their question of his authority. It's known as the parable of the two sons. He uses the authority of a father as an example. The father asks 2 sons to do something. One responds to his father's request by saying he will do what he was asked; but then does not do it. The other son responds to his father's request by saying he will not do what he was asked to do; but then does in fact do it.

We might conclude that the second son who eventually did what the father asked was the better son, and perhaps we would be correct. But the truth of the matter is that both sons disrespected the father's authority and let down the father because neither immediately responded to the will of the father. Their responses came based on their own desires and their own conveniences.

The parable pointed out the shortcomings of the chief priests and elders. They were like the sons in the parable in their responses to God's authority, even as it is presented through Jesus. Likewise, we are challenged by Jesus' authority. It is much easier for most of us to embrace Jesus as our Savior, the One who loved us so much that he was willing to sacrifice himself so that we might be made right with God. But the Jesus as Lord, the authoritative Jesus, the One who turns the world upside down with his commandments, which are ultimately God's commandments, that Jesus is a bit harder to take seriously at times.

Today as you may know is World Communion Sunday and we will be celebrating our Fall Love Feast. It will not be our traditional Brethren Love Feast. We will celebrate that one on Maundy Thursday. We will celebrate this Love Feast using that adapted model we used during the pandemic; yet all of its components have the same meaning. Let's look at each of the components under the light of the parable of "The Two Sons."

We begin Love Feast with a time of confession, admitting our sinfulness and our need for God's forgiveness. With this humble act, we acknowledge God's greatness and authority over us, and our need for God.

As we wash our hands and pray for our neighbor, we are reminded of Christ's command to serve others, even those we may not like, doing things that perhaps makes us feel uncomfortable. Instead of being at the ready and embracing the opportunities put before us to serve others, we might procrastinate, ignore or look for another more desirable opportunity to serve.

As we eat together, we are reminded Jesus' command to love one another, even those who we don't see eye-to-eye with, yes, including our enemies. Admittedly, that's not always easy, is it? It takes a special submission to God and God's Spirit to live in us to help us to love all people. Left to our own judgements, attitudes, and emotions, we would fail at this miserably. Yet loving one another, starting with those we each meet, heals the world.

In partaking of the bread and the cup, we recognize Jesus' authority. He is the One who saves us. He is the One who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This simple act of communion helps to remind us to place our trust in him and to be obedient to his commands and teachings. Today's text is very clear about those who say Jesus has authority in their lives and behave as if he does not. They will be lost from God's Kingdom. Those who welcome Jesus' authority, and live by it, are welcomed into God's Kingdom. Amen.