



## A sermon for the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity

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27 September 2020

- [Ezekiel 18.1-4,25-end](#)
- [Philippians 2. 1-13](#)
- [Matthew 21.23-32](#)

I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The political bantering that we often watch on a Wednesday at Prime Minister's Question Time was once described to me as 'political theatre'. Our politicians - and many watching - appear to love the cut and thrust of the words that are being shouted backwards and forwards - in jest or otherwise. Where words are said really to see what effect it has on others, words are said to simply impress others, or worse, said to engage in posturing. Reminding me somewhat of being on the playground at primary school when someone is showing off.

In our gospel reading from Matthew, the Chief Priests and elders - people with responsible roles - appear to have nothing better to do than to ask Jesus, "By what authority are you doing and saying the things that you do and say? Who gave you that authority?" Jesus appears to join in the game. And he responds to them, "Well, you answer my question first - and then I will answer your question. Tell me, John's baptism - was it from God or was it from man?" They thought for a while and then they replied, "We don't know." And so Jesus said, "Well if you can't answer my question, then I'm not going to answer your question."

And then what he does is to tell them a parable. And the parable is about two brothers and they are asked to do something. One said, "No," - and later on he does it. But the other says, "Oh yes, I will do it," - but then he didn't do it. Which category do we fall in? Because there's something about how we respond to that which Jesus asks of us - whether we respond with the kind of confidence that tells the world that we know who has given us the authority to do what we're doing and to say what we are saying. I often think that those of us who profess





the Christian faith, that we forget who called us, we forget why we go to worship – and so we find ourselves trooping in to the building, and we join in, because that’s what we do, isn’t it? But there comes a time when we must choose. There comes a time when we must ask ourselves, “What do we believe? What is at the core of what we believe?”

In our Old Testament reading from Ezekiel, they were having a problem too. Because they had been used to the idea that, actually, God is going to punish them no matter what. It is their fathers that have sinned, and so they are going to be punished for that sin – so what is the point of them changing their lives and living differently? The prophet Ezekiel challenges that, challenges them and us to the place of ownership, to the place of responsibility where we understand that we need to respond - not ride on the back of what our parents did or did not do - but we need to grow up, as it were, and be mature Christians, living out what it means to be the people of God. Let me just read briefly from our epistle reading from Philippians Chapter 2:

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.”

And then the writer goes on to say that Jesus himself, though he was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. So it’s a little bit like, “Don’t you know who I am?!” That’s not what we are about. We are to show the same kind of humility that Christ showed. We are to show the same of compassion, the same kind of love, as we journey in this faith of ours.

So, by whose authority? We must have the kind of confidence, that says the authority comes from God. The authority and the pattern of what we are doing is being patterned from our Father, our Father God who created us., And so it means that we no longer shout from the side-lines. It means that we walk in a way that says, “This God who has called us, has called us to be mature and grow up.”





And if we are grown up and mature, then it means that we will not be afraid of listening to a different opinion than ours. It means that we will not be afraid because somebody else expresses another view – but that we will listen. And that we will seek to understand. And that, importantly, that we will know where we are coming from and that we will know also that God calls us to act from a place of humility. Not a false humility, but the kind of humility that is patterned by our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the brother that said “no,” – perhaps he said “no” because he thought of a million and one things that he had to do and felt that he couldn’t possibly do another chore. But then he thought, “What is this about? What is this for?” You and I, too, will need to ask those questions – “What is my faith about?” More importantly, “What do I believe? And if I believe this, how is this expressed in my living?” Because that’s the crunch of it. Faith is not something that we lock away in the book. Faith is to be lived. And it is lived out in our relationships with one another – whether we show compassion, whether we show love, whether we show forgiveness, whether we show patience, whether we show the kind of gentleness that is needed as we reach out and embrace one another. And I want to add that this embracing is not just about the people who we know, it is not just about the people who are like us – but the ability as God’s children to reach out to our brothers and sisters who are from a different mother, the one Heavenly Father.

So my prayer today for us is that we may take responsibility for being the people of God and - more importantly - that we may live that humility that Jesus himself patterned for us to follow.

Amen.

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