

SERMON - Sun 27th Sept '26

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

READINGS:

Exod 17:1-7

Ps 78:1-4, 12-16

Phil 2:1-13

Matt 21:23-32

Opening Prayer

Loving God, open our hearts and minds this morning to hear and to believe; to understand your words and your will for us. Amen

Because we've been looking at Stewardship over the past 3 weeks, we have not been following our usual continuous readings of the Gospel. So as we jump back into Matthew this morning, it's probably helpful to have a quick recap of where we are, to help us understand the context of this morning's passage.

A little earlier in chapter 21, Matthew tells us of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, entering the city as a humble king riding on a donkey; the crowds welcomed him with cries of "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" (21:9). He was recognized, by some at least, as the Messiah who would "save his people from their sins" (1:21).

Then Jesus had gone to the temple, where he cured the lame and the blind. He also turned over the tables of the money changers and drove out people who were selling and buying there. (21:12-17).

The chief priests and the scribes were angry and felt threatened.

After this, Jesus went out of the city to Bethany and came across a barren fig tree which he curses because it bore no fruits (21:18-22). There is a symbolism here about those who know God but do not do His will.

As we start this morning's passage at verse 23, Jesus has just returned to the temple to teach when he's confronted by the chief priests and the elders, who asked him: "*By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?*" (21:23).

"Then Jesus said to the crowds and his disciples, '*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat; therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it, but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.*'"

Jesus acknowledges the Jewish leaders' good *teaching*.

They are not *ignorant* of God or his will.

“The problem is that they do not practice what they teach.”

They sit on Moses’ seat, claiming the authority of God, without doing His will.

With his challenging question about where John the Baptist’s authority came from, Jesus (21:24-25) catches the Jewish leaders by their own scheming. John was widely recognised by the people as a prophet, and the Jewish leaders did not dare to openly deny his authority, as they did behind closed doors.

The phrase “hoisted by your own petard” comes to mind.

Ever heard that ? – it means to be caught in an ironic reversal in which one is taken down by one's own schemes.

I was interested to learn that a petard was a small, bell-shaped bomb used in medieval times to blow up castle gates or breach fortress walls. They were extremely unstable and dangerous. If a bomb-maker set it incorrectly, it blew him into the air—or “hoisted” (lifted) him—by his own device.

The word *petard* traces back to the French word *péter*, which means to break wind.

Anyway, I digress :-)

To make his point further, Jesus gives **The Parable of the Two Sons**. (21:28-32).

A man has two sons. The father called the first son and asked him to go to work in the vineyard. The son said “no” but later changed his mind and went to work.

The man calls the second son, who says “yes” - but he did *not* go to work.

Jesus asks – *“Which of the two did the will of his father?”*

The first – who DID do the will of the Father, albeit after a bit of rebellion.

This son Jesus equates with the tax collectors and the prostitutes, who he says are going into the kingdom of God ahead of ‘you’.

The ‘you’ is the chief priests and the elders to whom Jesus is speaking directly.

In this parable both sons *know* what was being asked of them.

It’s about how they responded – what they did.

Why are the tax collectors and the prostitutes going into the kingdom of God?

Well, Jesus tells us straight - because they saw and believed; they were prepared to change their minds (21:31-32).

How willing are we to change **our minds**?

“Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” as Paul puts it so memorably in his letter to the Romans (Rom 12:2)

This does lead us toward a couple of very interesting questions ...

Is doing the will of God more important than knowing him?

and

How can I discern what the will of God actually is?

I'm sure we've all asked that question at some time or other? It's often at critical points, isn't it that we cry out *Lord, show me your will!*

In a sincere desire to please him, we can sometimes walk in fear that we will make the wrong choice about the details of our lives. Taken too far, this can become paralysing.

Others swing to the opposite end, thinking God doesn't really care about the details of our lives.

I believe he does care.

As we heard in our other readings this morning ...

- From Exodus – He is a God who provides
- And from the letter to the Philippians – He is a God who chose to be amongst us, to forego his glory to become human.

But I also believe that it's a mistake to focus too much on the **unknowable** aspects of God's will and forget that we DO, in fact, know quite a bit about what God wants of us. How do we know? Because he has told us ...

- in His Word
- and through His son, Jesus Christ.

For instance, we know it's God's will for us to love our neighbours, bridle our tongues, act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly. We know it's God's will that we not murder, steal, cheat, lie, slander, gossip, or boast.

Look at Micah 6:8 – *“He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?”*

As we read and study God's Word,

- we come to understand God's *revealed* will.

As we look at the person of Jesus Christ,

- we come to understand God's *revealed* will

... as we sit under good teaching,

... as we live our lives in community,
... as we serve and allow ourselves to be served,

- we grow in our ability to know God's *revealed* will.

As we get to know His voice, his character, so we learn to recognise it when we encounter it. We learn to discern whether something sounds like him, feels like him, is in line with what we know about him. Or not.

And that is not easy, nor do we always get it right.

But we are not alone in this.

We have a helper, a guide, in the Holy Spirit.

And as for God's unknowable will, well, we learn to trust Him.

I invite you to think and maybe talk about those 2 questions as you go about your week...

Is doing the will of God is more important than knowing him?

- I believe that obedience is good, but that He wants more from us – he wants relationship. Otherwise, why give up His cozy spot in heaven and get down here amongst us ?

And

How can I discern what the will of God actually is?

- Well, we can make a good start by getting to know Him.

How do YOU answer them?

Closing Prayer

Father God, we thank you that for all your vast un-knowable-ness, you have revealed to us enough of yourself that we *are* able to know and trust you. We thank you for your son Jesus Christ, that in him we can see and know you - enough to grasp your love and your will for us. Enough to give us a path, a way back to you.

Amen
