

Matthew 21:23-32

Pentecost 18; October 1 & 2, 2023

Things are not always as they seem to be. About 2 weeks ago, we had flown out to San Jose, CA to visit our son and his family. Everything went well with the flights as we arrived in San Jose. Because we have flown now into the airport in San Jose, we have become rather familiar with that airport. We were delayed in getting down to baggage claim because my wife wanted to see if she could find a new San Jose sweatshirt in the stores that are by the gates in the airport. When we got down to baggage claim, there were only a few pieces of luggage on the belt going around. The people on the flight were mostly gone. One of the bags that we had checked was purple. I grabbed it, along with our other luggage. We quickly caught an Uber ride to go to our son's house. Since we had left Milwaukee at 5am, we got to San Jose in the late morning. We grabbed our luggage from the back of the car. Put them in the guest room in the house, and then took our son's truck to do some sight seeing before our son and his wife got home from work.

Later that evening, I was about to open our purple bag to get some clothes out to get ready for bed. It was then that I noticed that the bag was not ours. I had grabbed the wrong bag at baggage claim. It looked similar in shape and color. But we didn't have a lock on our bag. I felt really dumb at that point. So, I was quickly on the way back to the airport to see if I could take this bag out and bring our bag back home to us. Luckily, our bag was there, so we made the exchange and returned back home. I thought I had grabbed the right bag, but I had grabbed the wrong one. Sometimes, things aren't always the way they seem to be.

As Jesus walked into the temple, things weren't the way they were suppose to be. The temple was to be a place where people were to go to pray, to worship, to present their sacrifices to God. As Jesus walked into the temple of Tuesday of Holy Week, he found a zoo. People were bartering doves and other animals. He saw people exchanging money. He did not see the temple the way it was suppose to be. So, what does he do? Matthew writes just a few verses before our text: **"Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'"** (Matthew 21:12-13)

The next day, Jesus returns to the temple to teach. This time Jesus wanted the people to see that things are not always the way they seem to be. Outwardly, the Pharisees looked like very God-fearing people. That was on the outside. Inside their hearts, things were completely different. They didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and they didn't want the people to see that Jesus was the Messiah. With that kind of heart, they came to Jesus to ask a question. **"By what authority are you doing these things?"** It seemed like a simple question. Yet, the answer was not so simple. If Jesus said that he had the authority of God, it would give them reason to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. If Jesus said by someone else's authority, it would shoot down the beliefs of people that Jesus was the Son of God. They saw no way out for Jesus.

But before Jesus would give an answer, he asked them a question. **"I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?"** Simple question. Simple answer, right? Yet, it wasn't simple for them. Even though John the Baptist had been dead for a while already, John was still respected by many people. If they answered that question and said it was from heaven, people could then be asked by others: *Why didn't you believe in him?* If they said from human origin, they could have a riot on their hands, because many people thought that John the Baptist was more than just a man. So, what do they answer? Nothing. Jesus didn't answer their question as well. Instead he was going to tell them a story to show that the hearts of the Pharisees and other leaders were far away where they were supposed to be.

The parable is simple. **"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' "I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. "Which of the two did what his father wanted?"** Did they catch what Jesus was trying to teach them? Who did the will of the Father? Neither, right? Son 1 and son 2, did not listen to the words of the Father.

So, who are the people in the parable? The Father is God. Son #1 is all of us. By our sinful, we cannot do what God demands. We cannot get to heaven by what we do. But then call us to repent and then we do the will of the Father. We

have a change of heart. Son #1 says no to God. But then there is a change of heart. God calls his people to repentance. He regrets what he had done. He wishes he could undo what he can do. He can't. Then he sees that Jesus can bring that change of mind.

Son number #2 is also us, before God calls us to repentance. We may look good on the outside, but inwards our hearts are so far away from God. Son #2 has no intention to have a change of heart. I think they caught what Jesus was saying about them. They knew that they had no intention of following the Father. But son #1 looks so much better than son #2, doesn't it? They are backed into a corner. **"The first," they answered.**" In reality, they were son #2.

Which son are we? Are we son #1? God gives us a whole list of commands to follow. He calls us to put him first in everything. He tells us not to misuse his name. He tells us not to hate people. We hurt people with our words. We are son #1. But then something happens when Jesus calls us to faith. No longer are we trying to run away from God, but now we find ourselves running toward him with open arms. Are we son #2? Do we sometimes pick and choose the commands we want to follow? There are times that it is easy to talk the talk, instead of walking the walk. Things aren't always the way they seem to be.

So, what makes the difference? What makes us change direction in our lives? It's Jesus, isn't it? Think of when Jesus is telling this story. In just a couple of days, he is about to go to the cross to die. The hands of the Pharisees are going to be raised against Jesus. Yet, what does Jesus do? He keeps calling them to repentance? He wants to change their hearts. But their hearts are so far away from him.

May we rejoice that things are not always the way they seem to be. Because if we were judged by our words and actions, we would be condemned. But we are not. It is the blood of Jesus that changes our hearts to be the way that God wants them to be. Amen.